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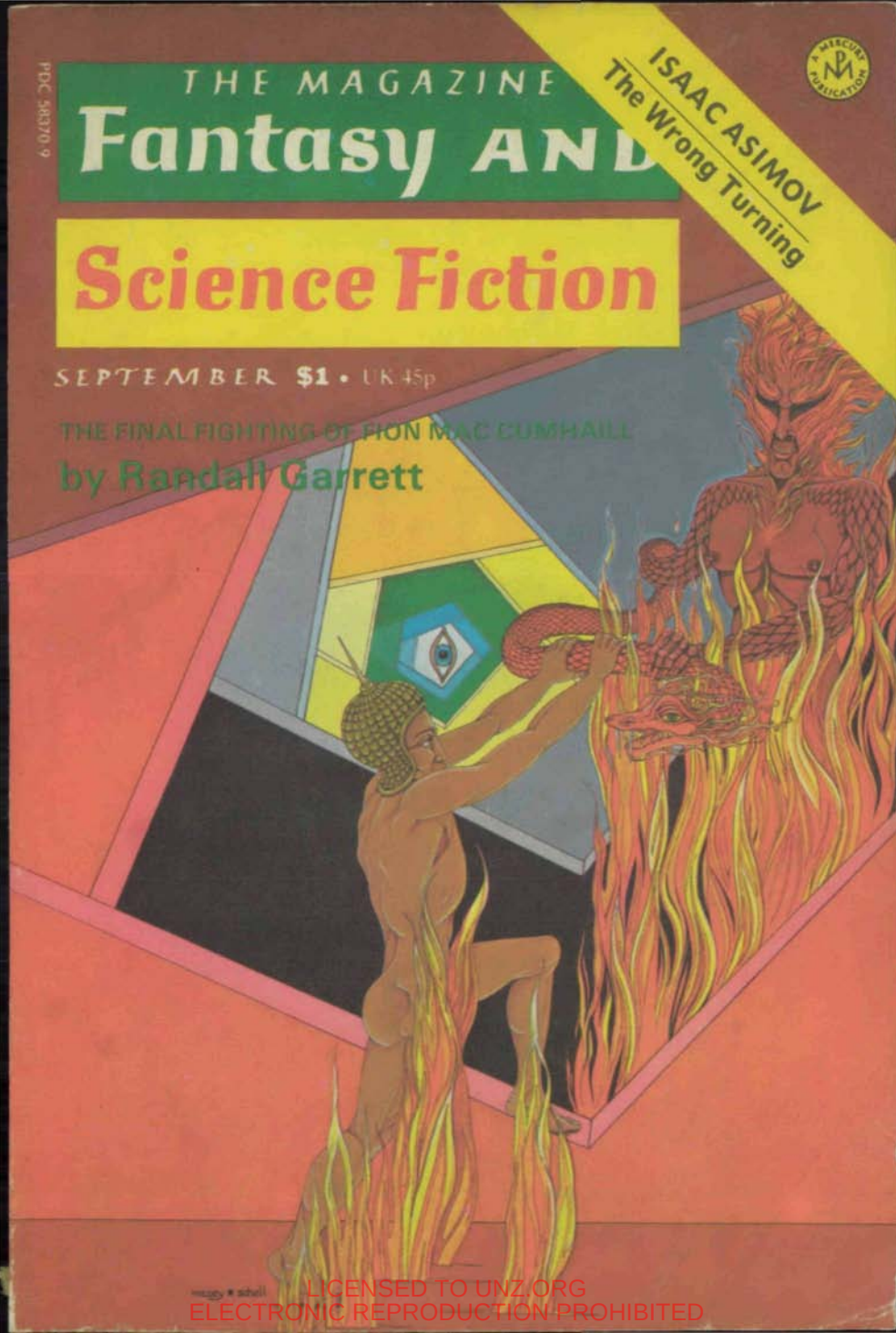
THE MAGAZINE

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

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ISAAC ASIMOV
The Wrong Turning

THE FINAL FIGHTING OF FION MAC CUMHAILL
by Randall Garrett

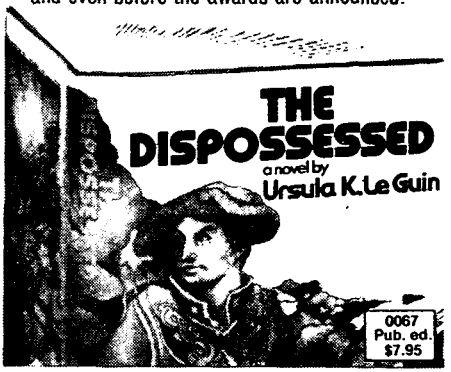


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Cover by Mazey & Schell for "The Final Fighting..."

Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR & PUBLISHER — Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE EDITOR

Dale Beardale, CIRCULATION MANAGER

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 49; No. 3, Whole No. 292, Sept. 1975. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.00 per copy. Annual subscription $10.00; $11.00 in Canada and Mexico, $12.00 in other foreign countries. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

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Something quite different from Robert Thurston: an unusual blend of crime and sf, in which an unprincipled therapist orchestrates the dreams of two patients with surprising results.

Dream by Number

by ROBERT THURSTON

"Go see a shrink," Marilee said. She looked absolutely delighted with the idea.

"I don't know what's supposed to be wrong with me," I said.

"All the more reason to have your head examined."

"But I have a morbid fear of psychoanalysts. I wouldn't be able to trust —"

"Dr. Bob Woods is *not* a psychoanalyst. He's not even an M.D."

"I didn't know that. What is he then?"

"He is a Ph.D. Experimental psychology was his field, but in school he found that he had an exceptional ability to straighten out people, so he set himself up in private practice. A fortunate decision, for I don't think he would bring so many people tranquillity in a lab."

"You proselytize too much. You know some of our crowd think he's a quack with a fad approach to serious problems."

"People are always against saints, you know that. Especially *our* kind of people. Besides, he says himself that he will refer someone with a *serious* problem to a regular psychiatrist. Mainly, he knows he has a gift and that it can be used for relatively normal people to help them cope better with their everyday problems."

"A gift? What, this dream therapy you rave about?"

"Don't get that sarcastic tone in your voice, Harry. Dream therapy is a legitimate approach. You go to sleep right in his office, and the advantage is you have your dreams ready to discuss soon as you're awake."

"Sounds pretty intuitive to me."

"Intuitive, maybe, but risky it's not. He merely supplies guidelines which help the person dreaming to sort out his problems and when

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awake, still in the grip of the dream, discern possible answers. Remember, he makes no attempt to judge your dreams and, as he says, only offers common-sense observations, well within the purview of a trained psychologist, about the dreams."

"All right," I said, more to get her out of the room than because I meant it, "I'll do it. I'll go to Dr. Bob Woods."

He had, after all, helped Marilee. Before she went to see him, there had been certain sexual acts she would not perform. She blamed her inability on frigidity, which she said had been instilled in her by overreligious parents. After just a few sessions with Dr. Bob Woods, she was more than willing to perform those certain acts. And then some.

Well, I figured, a shrink couldn't hurt.

When Harry Youngman called me and requested an appointment, I should have listened harder when he said it was at the recommendation of his wife. But the name did not register. I even wrote down Barry Younger on my appointment sheet. Perhaps I was trying to repress memories by intentionally getting the name wrong. Yet, Marilee had once meant so much to me that I could find no reason for repression. Anyway, I had an open slot in the schedule, and so I accepted him as a potential client.

Oddly enough, I liked Youngman at first. He was open, charming, gregarious. Lately, most of my patients had been jittery and uncommunicative, with a great deal of hostility to me in their dreams. To a certain extent, I enjoyed the idea of a chatty type, so I could at least have someone to talk to. In a way, counter my own depression with a client-buddy to compensate for my current lack of interesting friends and acquaintances. Youngman also had the good looks of early middle age, a little gray at the temples, an outdoor ruddiness to his city complexion, solid weight not yet gone to fat but about to start.

He tried to be direct and unemotional in presenting his problems. My preliminary impression was that his difficulties were minor — fear of death, plus the need which often accompanies it, the wish to get more out of life. He needed to play around a little.

I'm sure I could have helped him in only a few sessions. It was his fault he had to be married to Marilee.

"I want to be more affectionate to her, to relate to Marilee in a more, well, intimate fash —"

"Who?"

"Marilee. My wife Marilee."

"Marilee Younger — Young-

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man. Is that — I mean, your wife is Marilee. You're Harry — of course!"

"Of course I'm Harry. I told you all that on the phone. I mentioned Marilee."

"I'm sorry, you did of course."

"I don't understand. Does it make some difference for me to come to my wife's therapist? Former therapist."

"No. No difference."

Just all the difference in the world. All the difference, you son of a bitch.

Three or four years ago I was so in love with your goddamned Marilee that I was willing to pull a Gauguin and carry her off to the South Seas. Or hold her hand and jump into a volcano — it was that strong.

I had not thought anyone could get to me, especially a client. But Marilee came into my office as Sleeping Beauty — an attractive blonde who was not aware that men even looked at her, with a body that was not only voluptuous but quite literally unawakened. Such innocence seemed impossible. By the end of the first session, she had exposed her surprising lack of sexual knowledge and the concurrent stupidity of her husband, who apparently did not know what he had in her. I knew right away that her cure was going to be me laying her. Me. who had vowed to be ethical and to find all his sexual pleasure outside the office. How could one have standards when an opportunity like this arose, I thought, and knew at once that I had fallen into a cynicism that I had rebuked in certain of my colleagues.

My affair with Marilee was quickly begun and, unfortunately, her cure quickly effected. Frigidity was not the problem she had thought. A shyness complicated by a definite lack of opportunity complicated by a possessive husband was the source of her sexual life's limits.

I found that my own concepts of love and passion had no real substance. I had been smug, figuring that I had everything — when actually all I had was some mastery of techinique and a mistaken idea that I could not fall for any particular woman. Tragically, my professional acumen worked the reverse process on Marilee. She changed from a woman who believed the romantic myths of love and passion to a voluptuary who, I soon discovered, really did not care for the objects of her desire.

I made the discovery when I asked her to leave her husband and run away with me to the South Seas or anywhere.

"What?" she said. "And give up the perfect setup? Harry is rich

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and getting richer. He's also blind and getting blinder. I am having more fun than I could have imagined — every man I meet is immediately after me."

"I thought your husband was the possessive type."

"He is, but he's an idiot. I get away with murder now. I never realized I could until you started treating me. Now, watch out."

"But I love you."

"Well, I'm fond of you. I don't know why in these enlightened times you want more. You taught me my needs. Anyway, you're getting Tuesdays and Fridays as it is."

"You don't understand. I really love you. Really."

She stopped looking sexy.

"Then it's time for me to split, baby."

"How could you say that when I love you?"

"The words come easy. The attitude you taught me."

I sent her letters, made phone calls. But she had made the breakup final.

Now she had sent her husband to me. Why? There was nothing terribly wrong with him. I could only think of one reason. She was lonely and wanted me back, but was too proud to contact me directly.

Dr. Woods went overtime with the patient before me. He knew I'd be mad, he *had* to know. Maybe that was why he did it. He must reject me, let me know that there can be nothing unprofessional between us. I know that. But it pleases me to be with him. For an hour I can feel unaggressive and yet needed.

The previous patient turned out to be a rather nice-looking middle-age man with bedroom eyes. I couldn't help but smile at him. Like most men, he didn't seem to notice me.

"Trina," Dr. Woods said, "I hope you didn't mind the wait."

I started to say that of course I did and that I didn't think it was right for him to treat me so cavalierly, but then I knew what he would say. He would say that I am regressing to adolescent state in which I treat him as a father substitute. No, he would not say that. He would make me say that.

In his office, he seemed preoccupied. I tried to tell him about the last few days, about my loneliness, my destructive impulses.

"You're not listening," I said, with some anger.

"You are right, Trina, I am not listening. But I will."

"What's bugging you?"

"You continue to be quite percipient."

He was referring to the fact that I am quite sensitive to moods, sometimes to the point of reading

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minds, with occasionally a bit of clairvoyance.

He would not tell me what was on his mind. He listened to me for a while longer, then suggested dream therapy for the rest of the session. He knew I hated to use any of my time for sleep, because it deprived me of the contact with him. And I knew his arguments if I fought the treatment. We do have that close a relationship. A professional relationship. Besides, the dream therapy — his special technique, after all — had worked well in the past.

So I accepted his suggestion, relaxed, waited for him to include the code word in a sentence, and of course dropped off to sleep as soon as I heard it. But the dreams were not particularly productive. One had me in a meadow with a middle-age man I did not know. We did not seem to be doing anything. A plane flew by and dropped leaflets on us. The man picked up a leaflet and started reading it to himself. As he turned to me to tell him what it was all about, I woke up.

Dr. Woods seemed particularly interested in the middle-age man. Did I know who he was and was I sure I had never seen him before? Had I been doing any other dreaming of middle-age men? Though my answer was no, he seemed pleased.

I wanted to curse him out, but I left meekly.

Marilee did not seem at all interested in my visits to Dr. Bob Woods. When I told her he had initiated dream therapy on me, she seemed happy.

"Good," she said. "He's very careful with it, and he never uses it on someone who does not need it."

"But why is dreaming in his office any better than simply reporting the dreams I have here?"

"I think maybe because he works at influencing the dreams in some way."

"I've never noticed him doing anything that could be considered influencing my dreams. Did he do that with you?"

"Well, I don't know for sure, but I had reason to suspect."

"What reason?"

"Never mind. What have your dreams been like?"

Even though she pressed the question, I avoided telling her anything substantial about my dreams. If I told her that most of my dreams in Dr. Bob Woods' office had to do with a series of young girls whose only purpose in life was to seduce me, Marilee would take every opportunity to remind me about it.

Today I dreamed that an exceptionally attractive, and vaguely familiar, young girl wearing a tiger skin had pounced on me and

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torn my flesh with sharp teeth as she made love to me. She guided me in everything, even barking out instructions as to what my body was to do to hers next. At the end of the act, she lit a very long cigarette — the burning end of which dangled and swayed just above my penis — and told me I was great darling and that her name was Trina.

Dr. Woods asked me if I knew anybody named Trina or had ever seen anybody like her before. I said I didn't think so, but parts of the girl seemed familiar to me. He seemed satisfied.

I rented Room 414 at the Carzon Hotel on a week-to-week basis. The staff at the Carzon are known for their discretion, and nobody asked me why I was renting a room that I never used. They took my payments without even mentioning that the key was never off the hook.

Using my real name at the hotel might be risky. But it would be even more suspicious if it came out later that I'd rented under an alias. The violence in Room 412, and I do expect at least minimal violence, should not lead anybody to investigate the occupant of 414.

I wonder if I am planning this little experiment in revenge solely to please Marilee. Perhaps the excitement I feel at the potential of the experimental phase indicates more ego involvement than I'd care to admit.

Both Harry and Trina have brought me their photographs. Neither even speculated on why I might want a picture.

Their dreams are about to get much more vivid.

That Dr. Bob Woods is quite skilled. He says Harry let's try a little more dream therapy, and, before I know it, the code word's been uttered and I am on my way to dreamland.

I am beginning to enjoy the dreams very much. Very much. They are like special movies, concocted for me by the best of directors, cameramen, Oscar-winning actors. Today's was about Trina again, only she looked different than in previous dreams. In a way, not quite as pretty — yet more real somehow. She arrived in a large cup of milk (Busby Berkeley effect). Her breasts seemed to float on the milk's surface, and I could almost get a glimpse of nipple, much as in Claudette Colbert's bath in the 1934 *Cleopatra*. She invited me in with her, and I was eager, but when I tested the milk, it was scalding hot. She laughed and made the teacup whirl around. The handle hit me in the stomach, winding me and knocking me off the saucer. I don't remember what happened next but....

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Youngman is ridiculously easy to influence. He does not resist suggestion. Today, I concentrated on Trina's photograph, and, along with images of her, I sent him the suggestion to dream about her traipsing with him by a waterfall. As dreamers do, he metamorphosed my signal, changing water to milk bath, but, all in all, it was a pretty direct hit. He was quite easily guided into a romantic sequence with Trina.

If Trina would only co-operate as easily.

After Trina had made me perform with a dexterity and repetitiveness that had no relation to my abilities when awake, she took my hand and immediately we were flying. We descended onto a South Sea island, and Trina began a sensuous dance that promised many things, none of which were fulfilled before I woke up. I don't know why I dreamed of the South Seas. Ever since my first Dorothy Lamour film, I have absolutely hated the idea of the South Seas. I asked Dr. Woods about it, but he just shrugged and muttered something about a stereotypical dream symbol.

At the end of the session, Dr. Woods accompanied me to his outer office, something he rarely does. I was glad for his company, because of the surprise in store for me. Waiting there was the girl I had been dreaming about. It definitely was Trina. Only — here in his outer office, she paid no attention to me.

I asked Dr. Woods could we go back into his office for a second, but he perfunctorily ushered me out.

The son of a bitch doctor told me to come early today, then made me wait past my usual appointment time. He came out of his office with this middle-age man in tow. I think the man was the same one I'd found interesting before, but he had such a stupefied look on his face that I could not be sure. Dr. Woods made a point of introducing us, but the guy did not appear to notice, and the good doctor seemed to be studying my reactions.

During the session, Dr. Woods asked me if I had had any particular response to his previous patient.

"No, what kind of response should I have?"

"Do you like him?"

"Like him? How'm I supposed to know that? I don't judge at first sight. But I am uncomfortable around middle-age men...."

He started to ask why, but I quickly said:

"Except for you, of course."

That stopped him. I don't know

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why I work so hard to destroy what little rapport I have with Dr. Woods. I want him to be tender with me again. He has not been for so long. But he keeps infuriating me. Today he put me through the dream treatment. Again. I tried to protest, but he slipped in the code word somewhere.

When I woke up — at precisely ten minutes before the end of session, as always — he asked what my dreaming had been like.

"The usual crap. I don't really remember it."

"Try."

"A lot of garbage, something about this strange place. Exotic."

"An island?"

"Definitely *not* an island. No, this was the jungle — the heart of darkness. Ugly trees and oozing things. I was scared and I sat down in the middle of a path and refused to move. Except there were crawly things all over the path, and I had to. But I don't remember any more."

"Any other people in it?"

"Some creep kept jumping out from behind trees and rocks, but I gave him a chop in his pot belly and kept knocking him back, so —"

"His pot belly. He was an older man then, middle-aged?"

"You've got a fixation on middle age. Going through a few aging-traumas yourself, Doctor?"

The anger in his eyes made me hate myself for having such a big mouth. I calmed down and gave him a description of the man. He seemed to approve of the description. Who knows what pleases him?

Trina continues to resist but not as successfully as she might think. She is merely transferring the suggestions I send her, changing them into symbols without easily apparent correspondence. But I know her, and they do correspond. She has to make a jungle out of a South Sea island, and she refuses to dream specifically about Youngman, changing him into someone with only a vague resemblance, then rejecting him with a blow instead of accepting him into her arms. No, she is not succeeding as well as she thinks. Her dreams are replete with correspondences.

I must proceed cautiously. If she continues to resist the therapy, the adventure in Room 412 may have to be put off a couple of months.

The middle-age man from Dr. Woods office kept appearing in my dreams last night. Should I tell the doctor about it? The man was quite sexy. In one of my dreams he lifted me into his arms and took me dancing on the surface of one of those big balloons. Dirigible. No, more like Zeppelin in this case. And right on the surface, not inside

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a cabin or anything. We swirled around what seemed like miles of the surface without regard to gravity. Once I looked and saw the earth, but its colors were all wrong and some of it was on fire. Later, we made love on a quite real bed. Everything he did, he was wonderfully tender with me. I miss such tenderness.

What would Dr. Woods make out of these dreams? Since he was asking about middle-age men, he might be pleased. I'll tell him.

I went to the hotel this afternoon. When I arrived, a maid was changing the linen in 412. Her back was turned toward me, and I was able to slip into the room unnoticed. I took refuge in the bathroom. Crisp white towels, piles of wrapped mini-soap, and a band of paper across the toilet seat made it clear that she'd finished the bathroom, and the odds were that she would not look in again. What if she did? No matter — with hotel people you could be sure of one thing: whatever excuse you made up, they had already heard it or something like it.

She took her own good time finishing up the other room, but finally, humming a commercial jingle about getting a little love in her life, she left.

I attached the tape recorder to the back of the headboard of the double bed. It was unlikely that even the maid would discover it there. Again, what if she did? These days she would probably think it had something to do with government investigation, then leave it right where she found it. I set the activator, replaced the bed, let myself out of the room — carefully leaving the door unlocked — and went to 414. Using the remote control, I pressed the button which would start the tape player going. Returning to 412, I was greeted by the pleasant Muzaklike melodies which I had recorded onto the early part of the tape. I smiled to myself, knowing the setup would work just fine. After returning to 414 and shutting off the remote control, I walked to the elevator whistling. As I passed the maid coming out of another room into the corridor, I changed my whistling tune to the one she had been humming. She smiled at me as if we were siblings under the skin.

Marilee is curious again. I told her I didn't want to talk about my sessions, that some things were sacred after all. But she persisted. I let out a little information at a time; she kept asking for more. Finally I had to admit that I had been dreaming about a woman, and Marilee laughed happily.

"What's the name of this girl?"

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"Why are you so sure she's got a name?"

"It's got to be a specific somebody."

"Could very well be an idealized fantasy — a movie starlet combined with —"

"Not in these dreams. C'mon, who's the doxy?"

"Well, it *is* somebody."

"Who?"

"Well, it's another one of his patients. Named Trina."

"Good!"

"Why are you so pleased?"

"My own reasons."

"I still don't see how you knew about Trina."

"Let's just say I'm familiar with the methods of Dr. Bob Woods."

"He used this kind of dream therapy on you?"

"Yep."

"And did you dream of — of a specific somebody?"

I could tell by her furtive look that she wished she had not introduced this subject, but Marilee was not one to retreat, even from a conversation.

"Yes. Yes, I did dream of somebody."

"Who?"

"Dr. Bob Woods."

I can't get this middle-age guy out of my head, much less my dreams. It's even getting weird. I had a dream right in Dr. Woods office today, where the guy was intending to screw me with a green wine bottle shaped like a fish. I grabbed the bottle from his hands and broke it over his head. Then I knew I was going to use the broken glass to cut him up; so I forced myself awake. After I had reported the dream, in the period where Dr. Woods requires me to provide any analysis I can of the dream (and sometimes relate it to a picture whose image he's been mentally sending me), he asked:

"Do you have any ideas on the meaning of this dream, Trina?"

"Well, I know I've been served this kind of wine in a fish bottle at a seafood dinner, but —"

"The meaning — what might it *mean* to you?"

"I don't know. All I know is that I didn't want him to shove it into me."

"Were you scared because it was too big?"

"Not exactly. I think — I think I was afraid he would stick it in and then break it somehow — it makes me shudder just to say that now."

"It could have some significance."

"What?"

"I'm afraid that's for you to —"

"I know, I know. Every dreamer has his own kind of symbol and must discern the interpretation himself. God, I can't —"

"Do you find any importance in

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the fact that the bottle you feared would be used sexually and be subsequently broken while still inside you, that you *then* break it over Harr — the man's head followed by an urge to mutilate him further?"

"It certainly sounds pretty heavy when you put it that way —"

"I wasn't trying to make an analogy myself — at the very least I wanted to point out the connection, so you could think about it."

"I don't think I want to."

He tried to lead me into a deeper interpretation, but I had to avoid that. He asked me if I knew of anything I could do in my own life to relieve the tension in my dreams. I knew by the way he said the word that he meant sexual tension, and I wanted to tell him that the answer is you, doctor, you. Instead, I said I had no idea.

He suggested that it might not hurt for me to find myself a lover, the callous stupid son of a bitch.

Trina worries me. Her latest dreams, in which she continues to manifest hostility towards Harry, are beginning to be interlaced with a more severe brand of violence. In my office yesterday she had the old coke bottle dream that many women have reported, only in her case the coke bottle was changed into a fish-shaped wine bottle. While she did not allow penetration by the bottle, she did attempt to destroy Harry with it.

Perhaps she is receiving more telepathically than I am consciously sending. It is possible that she has picked up some of my plans, and her rejection of the bottle is a way of communicating to me that she does not wish to be victimized, as if she is saying that she will not be pawn in my game to win Marilee by discrediting her husband. Since Trina is also in love with me, it would be logical that she would cringe from performing any act that would lose me to another. I must be more careful during my sessions with her. She *is* a sensitive with, as far as I can tell, undeveloped ESP powers. While that makes her a good dream subject, it is possible that she is *too* good.

She definitely does have a will of her own. If I am successful in bringing her and Harry together, and into Room 412, their affair — though brief — should be stormy. Perhaps that will be in my favor.

I believe that everything will work out well, helpful for everybody except probably Harry, who may end up in jail, institutionalized, or at least out of Marilee's life, poor simp. But Trina, with some of that fury out of her system, will be a more pliant subject and patient who hopefully will have lost her love fixation on her therapist; and I will

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have an open road to the love of my life; and Marilee, luckiest of us all, will have me. I am more certain than ever that she sent Harry to me as a plea to release her from her prison into my waiting arms.

But why didn't she just call?

Perhaps I am wrong.

Whatever, I will have extended my usage of dream therapy into new experimental regions.

The middle-age guy came up and spoke to me today. We were in the coffee shop across from Dr. Woods' building. I don't know why I was there — it was much too early for my appointment, and I almost never patronize that coffee shop, where they once served me ground roast formaldehyde. But there I was, drinking the formaldehyde and eating a bun that must have been preserved in it, and the man —Harry — sits down beside me, says Hello Trina, and starts talking to me like we were firm friends. And, you know, I responded just as warmly. I felt very good vibrations from him. I must have liked him, since I let him buy me a second cup of coffee.

It was incredible that she was there. And so accessible. I had dreamed of the coffee shop in detail the day before, and I had never even been there. For the first time, I noticed how like Marilee she was. But gentler, as Marilee had been before her dream therapy treatments. I knew, as I talked to Trina, that the only route open to me was to seduce her. What, after all, has all the dreaming been for?

From my office window I watched them leave the coffee shop. They were talking animatedly, and their body language was a distinct romantic dialect. When Trina had transformed my message of the coffee shop into a gigantic medical laboratory, I had been wary of success. However, as usual, the message had been received by her in her own twisted fashion.

It may be only a few days to Room 412.

Marilee seems suspicious but curiously unconcerned. I tried to tell my lies, she asked no questions.

"Won't be home tonight, dear."

"Okay."

"Maybe not all night."

"Sure."

"Business."

"Right."

"You'll be all right."

"More than adequate."

"I can come home if you've got something planned."

"No plans. Quiet evening. Some TV. *Maude,* probably."

"Well, I'll try to get home as early as I can, but you know how business —"

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"It really does, darling."

"Yet —"

"Don't worry. I'll be fine."

"Well —"

"Be good for you to have a night to — to yourself."

Does she know? Does she read my dreams, too?

I never thought I'd do the hotel routine with anybody. My preference has always been your apartment or mine, but of course I won't go to Harry's place, and he is frightened of mine. His theory is that we should test ourselves on neutral grounds.

"I don't see why you're so uptight about my digs."

"I can't really explain."

"Try."

"Well, I'm afraid of the dreams that may be there."

For a minute, I was too zonked out to say anything.

"Wow!" I finally said. "That is a weird thought. What's even weirder is, I think you might be right."

So we agreed on the Carzon Hotel, handy and unostentatious. Harry's already booked the room.

The desk clerk did not express any curiosity over my desire for a specific room. I told him anyway that 412 was my lucky number, then I tried to remember what was lucky about it.

Harry Youngman is so suggestible I should ship him to the Rhine Institute as soon as I've wound up this whole strategy. I followed him after the session in which I had planted in his mind the hotel and room number. He went directly to the Carzon apparently without considering another hotel, and finagled the room with ease.

From here on in, everything should be easy. Harry and Trina will come to the hotel tonight. I will already be next to them in Room 414. They will accomplish whatever romantic acts they have in mind and, during their post-coital exhaustion, I will activate the tape recorder which, in turn, will easily lull them toward sleep. My voice on the tape speaking the code word will hasten them into dreamland. Then, while I stare at a painting by George Bellows depicting prize fighters in action, I will transmit to Harry feelings of unease and anger toward Trina. The feelings, plus the graphic picture, should bring out the repressed urges toward violence which I know are within him. To Trina I will send, while looking at my favorite Corot landscape, thoughts of peace and tranquillity, a longing for a more orderly, less hectic, existence.

I feel I need the contrast in order for the hostility she will receive from Harry to resolve itself in a positive outlook for her. That

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is, the difference between what she longs for (and needs) and the kind of crap she always gets will form the groundwork for a more balanced view of her own life in which she will be willing to make healthy adjustments to achieve her desires. It is risky, and a bit radical, but I feel that I can lead her in this direction during subsequent therapy. (It is amazing to me how I have combined so many experimental levels that will be later useful with a motive of simple forthright revenge.)

Anyway, Harry, upon awakening at my taped suggestion, will manifest some kind of loud hostility and perhaps some assault, on Trina. (Poor Trina, I apologize in advance for putting you through all this, but unfortunately you are the ideal victim, and, as I have said, Daddy will make better later.) When the hostility commences, I will rush to the hallway phone — I cannot use my room phone, since my proximity would be suspicious, at least to Harry and Trina if they found out — call the police, pretend to be a hotel official, and report untoward violence in Room 412. They will soon arrive, catch Harry in the act, and do their duty. Harry will thus be involved in a public scandal, Marilee will have plenty of grounds for divorce, and I will have plenty of grounds to make indecent proposals to Marilee. I wish I could call her now and brilliantly tick off the details of my plan. Yet, I have a strange feeling that she knows.

Harry really knows how to treat a woman. He brought me a single long-stemmed rose and, as we left my apartment building, bought me another one from a nearby flower vendor.

"Rose by rose, we'll build a bouquet for you tonight," he whispered. And he did just that. Before going to the hotel, he took me to a French restaurant and a lavish dinner. But first he found a place to buy me another rose. At the restaurant he whispered something to a waiter. When the bottle of Mumm's was served, another long-stemmed rose was nestled beside it.

During dinner Harry was more tender than he had ever been before. He touched my hand frequently and said beautifully poetic things. As we left the restaurant, the doorman winked, and handed me a rose. I now had five, and surprisingly the first was still as dewy as the last. In the taxi I asked Harry if there would be a sixth rose, to bring my bouquet to a half-dozen. He shrugged.

When we arrived at the room, I suddenly froze.

"Take it easy," Harry said. "Just nerves."

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"No, not nerves. It's that number, 412. I've been thinking of that number. I don't know why, but —"

"It's your lucky number, *our* lucky number."

"Maybe, but —"

He kissed me, took me by the hand, and gently guided me into the room. Already there, in an ice bucket, was a bottle of champagne. On one of the pillows of the bed was my sixth rose.

Trina came out of the bathroom wearing a mint-green peignoir. It was all I could do to stay on the schedule I had planned, I wanted her so much. But I had not ordered the champagne for decoration, and so I poured us each a glass. She took a sip and said it tasted magnificent. As we drank the champagne, we talked quietly of innocent things. When our glasses were empty, Trina picked up the champagne bottle from the bedside table where I had set it down.

"Foolish of me," I said. "I should have put it back in the ice bucket. It'll be warm."

She lifted the bottle to her face, rubbed it against her cheek.

"No," she said, "it's just right. Feel."

She duplicated the gesture against my cheek. I got a strange pleasure from the touch. She poured wine into our two glasses.

"Here, I'll put it back in the ice bucket, and the next glass'll be nicely chilled."

"That's good. It'll be a while before we get to it."

Harry insisted on undressing me. He did it kindly, gently, without the klutziness of most of the rough-and-tumblers I'd been with. It was silly, but I began to feel very nineteenth-century, very pre-lib woman. I mean, this was just boy-girl stuff, just sex, but I got a decadent pleasure out of the pretense of secret lust and demure action. I knew I could show Harry a few surprising tricks, but this first time had to be different. I did not want to lose his tenderness now. Not now.

As I readied my materials, I could hear the pair of them begin their rites. The walls of the rooms were so thin — perhaps my plan was too elaborate. Did I really need the tape recorder? I could have whispered the code word through the walls.

In spite of my fascination with their progress, I concentrated on emptying my mind of extraneous details. This part of the adventure, in effect the experimental part, required a mental control more strict than in simple dream therapy. I had to send two separate, and somewhat conflict-

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ing, sets of thoughts, messages, moods, and impressions to the two subjects in the adjacent room. Each subject had to be influenced to a different style of action. Since I'd had so many sessions with Harry and Trina, I operated from a solid understanding of the methods of transmission to each. They received my signals differently, but I had devised a rigid pattern of procedure adjusted to their separate reception potentials. So I had no worry of the efficacy of the double transmission. I could only worry that I might be trying to influence one, while the other was in a dream period. If only I could sneak into 412 and attach REM apparati to them. Knowing their rapid-eye-movement periods would also validate the results of the experimental aspect.

Still, with all the obstacles, I could not help but be excited at the sheer bravado of the attempt. If it was as successful as I suspected, it was a pity that I would not be able to write it up for the journals. Well, later I would finagle some funds, set up a model, and run this experiment under laboratory conditions. Perhaps I could do it after I returned from my world tour with Marilee.

It seemed a ridiculous thought at the onset of love-making, but I was wildly happy that the smell of Trina was so sexual. Not subtly perfumed in all those places, like Marilee who is embarrassed by her physical odors.

Even sillier was the thought that Trina's skin was so *normal*, unevenly textured — as opposed to Marilee's, which had been deliberately beaten into softness by years of creams and lotions.

I suddenly realized what was happening in my head. The Trina of my dreams had been imbued with the physical characteristics and sexual habits of Marilee. Now — touching Trina, seeing the differences, seeking the mysteries — I knew better.

In sexual techniques Trina provided a pronounced contrast to Marilee. Where Marilee knew all the artful, smooth, and well-timed movements of her body, Trina proceeded in a more exciting, less controlled way. For moments she would become extremely sensuous, her fingers clawing at me, her mouth pressing painfully hard. Then she would suddenly become limp, soft, terribly gentle. The changes intoxicated me, made my attempts at controlling my own desire more difficult than usual.

He was much more solidly built than the flabby middleage man of my dreams. And so shy. He went about everything so slowly that my whole body became sensitized and

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I could have screamed at every touch. Finally he whispered that it was time, and he entered me so gently that I might not have felt him if it weren't that he filled me so well. It was like my fantasy come true, the kind of masturbatory fantasy I'd had about Dr. Woods. Only better, much better. The hell with Woods, I nearly shouted out loud, as Harry began to increase the intensity of his love-making.

The two of them took one damn long time going about it. I had everything set up for- God knows how long. Instead, I had to sit and listen to bed creaks and whispered love words so dully rhythmic I could have danced the hora to them.

I felt exhausted, but not exhausted - depressed, as with Marilee. No Exhilarated.

He had been so tender, loving, even polite in asking me my wishes at each stage.

I started to tell Trina that the act had never before been so complete for me, but she nestled against me and whispered we'd talk later.

I knew what I wanted now. I wanted to make this man my own.

For a dazed moment, I thought I saw Marilee standing by the bed, looking cooly amused.

I would have him no matter what I had to do to get him.

If she had actually been there, I would have told her to go to hell, this is the real thing.

Whatever I had to do.

Thank God they were done with it. Just sitting there listening tired me out. I even had a stupid desire for a post-coital cigarette.

I set eagerly to work. First, I pressed the activator button. The music came on abruptly. I could hear it clearly. Apparently I had set the volume control of the machine a bit louder than I thought.

As I was just drifting off to sleep, some damned canned music came out of nowhere. Trina muttered what is that, and I told her it was probably somebody playing a radio in the next room. She said it felt like it was right next to her head.

Even though I'd recorded the tape, it seemed longer than I had expected to reach the point where my voice spoke the code word. Finally it came, the word albatross.

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I heard myself whispering it three times. Once was technically enough, but I wished to take no chances.

The music softly faded out, as I'd recorded it, and I pressed the button to deactivate the machine. Making myself comfortable, I began to concentrate. Alternating my attention between the two pictures, I formulated a specific set of psi-conducive messages to transmit to each subject. I became fascinated by the way I could switch moods so adeptly. As often happens, I nearly went into a trance as I melded my own personality with that of both my subjects.

It seemed that I could almost see their dreams, almost guide the course of their actions. Everything was working out smoothly.

I saw Marilee, then Trina. They both offered themselves to me. At times they seemed melded into one, then separate. I could not keep track of which was which. I would seem to embrace Trina's body, then look up and see Marilee's face. I would try to push Marilee out of the strange dream-room, and she would look back at me from the doorway, and it would be Trina. Angry, I tried to flee from them both, but of course that was impossible. I knew it was impossible before I even started to run. I suddenly found myself in an ugly place. Rocks and mud, fire, swamp, odious gases, threatening shadows, awful colors streaking in front of my eyes. Marilee was there. She wanted me to make love to her. She spread herself out on a flat rock provocatively. I can take you and the doctor at the same time, she said. Where is the doctor, I said. Right in the next room, she said. This is a swamp, this is open space, there's no next room here. I looked around for the doctor and could not see him, though there were strange shapes lurking behind things and in shadows. Where is Trina, I cried. I've killed her, Marilee said; I wrapped her oh-so-willing legs around her throat and strangled her with them. That is anatomically impossible, I said. Not so much, not if you do it right, and then it is painful for an extremely long time. I'll kill you, I shouted, and jumped at her. I tried to hit her, but kept hitting the rock. My hands broke like dropped porcelain, shattered into pieces. I tried to pick up the pieces but realized I could not because I had no hands. Then I was attacked, by figures whose shapes I could not define. I could see no faces. I still looked for the doctor. I tried to fight them, but it was no use. One of them picked me up and threw me at the rock. I could feel myself shattering ...

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I was a peasant girl, standing by a river. A river so green that it had to be a past time. I told myself I would just sit here and enjoy the beauty, but I quickly became uneasy. I am alone, I thought. I can't bear to be alone, must do something about it. I ran, for what seemed like an eternity. I passed through all kinds of landscapes and rooms, but stopped for none of them. Finally I saw Dr. Woods ahead. I must reach him, I thought, try to force him to make love to me. But each time I called to him, he just glanced at me and turned away. Each turning away put him a further distance from me. I hollered come back, come back, and I heard his voice saying take it easy, rest, feel at ease, think of Harry and what you think of him, how you love him. I do love Harry, I cried, but I want you. That doesn't make sense, he said, you know you are in love with Harry and want him forever. Why dredge up the old passion for me? It is senseless. His voice became confused, it was as if he were talking in two different tones of voice. Things began to swirl. We were back by the river again. I cried out that I did not want to be here. Dr. Woods appeared on the other side of the river and told me that this was my place, the place I had to be, isn't it calm and tranquil, don't you just love it? No, I hate it and I hate you and I want you and I must have you and after having you I must kill you. Kill me? I have to kill you, you are a monster. No, my dear, you are merely transferring your own sense of guilt to me. You don't want to kill me, you want to expunge me from your emotional life. Expunge me. That is a good sign. You are progressing. You will be cured. Suddenly we were both in his office and yet still beside the river. And Harry was there, too. And I wanted him, and I wanted the doctor ...

I was whole again and in a different place. Trina, in an eighteenth-century costume, was nursing me, rubbing my head with a damp handkerchief. Everything is OK, she said, everything is fine, you are quite successful, you are holding in your anger, nobody knew you could do that so well. Stay with me, I said. I will, she said, but almost immediately stood up and left. I ran to the door she had just gone through. It was red velvet with fleurs-de-lis all over it. I tried to open it but it was locked. I ran around the room, looking in vain for another exit. There was nothing I could use to pry open the door. I started running at it and kept getting bounced off it as if it were a vertical trampoline. Frustrated, I began to tear at it.

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Surprisingly, the cloth ripped easily, and I could step through the rip. Trina was there, sitting on a lawn. Stay with me please, I said. I will, she said, and immediately stood up and ran away. I tried to chase her, but she disappeared. Things became more chaotic. There were places to look everywhere. Doors, windows, tunnels, large trees, packing boxes, drawers, many other things. I knew that I had to search for Trina in each and every one of them. But in each place I looked, there was Marilee looking at me impishly then laughing hysterically. Finally I was exhausted and had to rest. Marilee came to me. You're cracking, she said, I can see it and who knows you better than me? Go away, I said. Okay, I will, she said, but she stayed. Then she kept saying the same things over and over, about what a big flop I was and how I couldn't even run a single love affair right and how I was pretending to myself that I had achieved a genuine romantic experience with Trina when actually I had been just pulling ancient strings, running my own puppet show on a moldly decayed stage. No, I protested, it was beautiful, I never had anything like that with you. But that's just your romanticism, dear Harry, you wanted a just-right fling, with everything carefully worked out and that's just what you got. You needed a little whore like this one and you got her, and now you can come back to the boat. She is not a whore. Ask her, Marilee said. I'll kill you, I shouted, and plunged at Marilee. But, as I started to hit her, she changed to Trina. I sprang backwards and apologized, and Trina said in Marilee's voice, that is OK, in this culture a man is allowed to beat his little whore to his heart's content. Then her face changed back to Marilee. Whore, she said. And I started hitting her again. And again she became Trina. Trina said, it's all right, I deserve it, I am tainted, I have tainted you. No, I screamed. Yes, she screamed, and changed back to Marilee. I tried to restrain myself, but could not — I had to hit Marilee, it was important that I hit Marilee. She laughed as my fists came at her. As I drew my hands back, she was of course Trina again. I love you, Trina said. And I could not stop from hitting her. Then I just began to strike without regard to what face she had on. I pushed Marilee down onto the floor, she changed to Trina, and I struck harder than ever. I grabbed their head by the hair and began to pound it on the floor. At each rebound the face changed. I no longer cared. I was trying to smash the face into a bloody pulp so that it would not

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matter which aspect if had on at a given moment. I grabbed something, a club or a chair, and began to hit her face with it. I was starting to enjoy the act of beating. I was planning to hit harder as I woke up.

Halfway through the experiment, I began to feel that I was receiving a transmission from one of the subjects. But the message was vague and muddled. Resistance was being offered. I countered it with an increased concentration. There is a point during this kind of procedure when I seem to actually enter the painting I gaze at. I reached that point on both pictures. I had to, as it were, wrench myself out of one in order to resume transmission of the other. Finally I could send no more, and I believe I became unconscious, but only for a very brief moment.

I don't know what came over me. My nightmare had awakened Trina, and she was attempting to minister to me. As I looked up into her face, for a moment fully expecting her to change to Marilee, I began to notice how washed-out her skin looked, how stupid her eyes, her uneven teeth. The sound of her voice rattled me. She was trying to make me feel better, but I only wanted her to shut up.

"I'm all right," I shouted, "just leave me alone!"

It was wrong to shout at her like that, I knew, but I couldn't help it. And, when I thought of taking it back, I saw all the hurt in her face, and I could not form the proper forgiving words. Instead, I was furious at her for putting me on the defensive. She had no right to pull one of those female tricks. Women thought that treating a man was just a series of pretenses, like putting on the right faces and saying the things they didn't mean in order to keep you in line and on edge. Marilee kept me on edge, Trina would do the same thing.

Yet I didn't really believe what I was thinking. I just could not stop thinking it.

It was like a metamorphosis. Harry went to sleep a gentle, loving person and woke up acting like any man I had ever been with. Why did I keep getting just this far and no further with men? Why couldn't I once get past this point? I tried to overlook his mood, attributing it to his dream. Yet, inside, I felt that I was getting more of the true picture in the way he rejected me at that moment. I did not want to think that, but it seemed to me that his selfish attitude, even in such a moment of stress, was a clue to the complexities of his personality, those complexities that are care-

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fully hidden in the early stages of a relationship. What are you saying, I said to myself. How can you jump to such a mammoth conclusion on such scant evidence? You know what, you have been in therapy too long. All simple clues seem to have immediately apparent meanings to you.

I steadied myself and offered to serve him the last of the champagne.

"My head is a balloon ready to burst," he said, "and you offer me some more booze. Jeez!"

"Damn it, I'm not trying to qualify you for AA, I'm only trying to settle you down."

"I don't need to be settled down. I'll be all right. Just lay off."

"You can just drop that tone, Harry. I'm not going to start excusing you just because this is a big romantic moment and —"

"Who said it was a big romantic moment, it's just —"

"Nobody said. Forget it."

He threw off the bed covers and started to sit up, but did it so energetically that he knocked his head against the back of the bed. I reached out to help him.

"Here, let me —"

"Get away!"

He hit my shoulder and pushed me away, so hard that I nearly fell off the bed. That does it, I thought. I would not co-operate any longer in his misery.

I decided that the best thing was to leave. I reached for my clothing.

"Where do you think you're going?" I said, as I saw her pulling her blouse over her head. At the same time I noticed that her hips were too big and there were stretch marks all over her already-weighty legs.

"I'm getting out of here, that's what I'm doing," she said.

"Stay," I said. I needed her to stay and I could not figure out why. "Please stay."

"I'll stay," she said, much as she had said it in my dream. "Like hell I'll stay."

She reached for her skirt. Hearing those words from her, the words from the dream, I became enraged. What did she mean talking to me like that?

"You will goddamn well stay!"

I pulled the skirt away from her. She was so surprised that she released it without resistance. I had pulled so hard that I stumbled backwards and collided with the stand containing the ice bucket. The stand began to sway. I reached for it, her skirt still in my hands, and I almost caught it. But my timing was off and the ice bucket tipped over, sending the champagne bottle to the floor. Ice slid down Trina's skirt, leaving wet trails. At the same time, cham-

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pagne bubbled out onto the hem.

I was pleased with the way things were going next door. My techniques were working more efficiently than I had anticipated. I knew they would work up to fighting, but they had a brawl going with the slightest of preparation. As I had planned, Trina was being very womanly and Harry was fuming. He shouted at her. She said she would leave, which scared me for a minute, but then I heard the sound of a scuffle, then something falling over. Excellent, I thought.

Harry really came on like a demon. Suddenly he had grabbed my skirt while I was trying to put it on, and then just as suddenly it was ruined. Water and champagne damaged. It was an old skirt, yes, but like everything else on me for this night I had worn it for luck. As if it had suddenly caught fire, Harry dropped the skirt onto the floor, where it could get more champagne bubbles over it.

I went to pick it up.

"I'm sorry," he said in a choked fashion as I bent over.

"It's OK," I said. "Just sums up the night perfectly."

I picked up the champagne bottle with the skirt. I stood in front of him and, with the best smile I could manage under the the circumstances, poured the rest of the champagne on the skirt.

"Why the hell did you do that?" Harry shouted, much more loudly than he had to.

"I didn't want to waste the rest of the champagne," I said.

"You — you —" Harry said, his face reddened by anger.

"Me, me, what?"

"You — you're not what I thought you were."

"You know, it is oddly ironic that it should be you saying that, you fractured asshole."

The word seemed to set off something in him. He reached out to grab me, but I backed away.

I could not understand what was happening, but the emotion coming through the walls was intense. Even then, I noted that Trina's responses were a bit strong, not much like what I had programmed. Perhaps, I thought, it is not in her nature to be calm. She certainly had not responded well to tranquilizers. Well, so what? A little temper from her definitely seemed to inspire Harry to more fury. Nothing seemed terribly wrong.

Even Marilee had never made me so incensed. Yes, I could get mad at her and take a magazine into the bathroom and sit on the john for a while — but I normally

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suppressed all urges to strike her. But, with Trina, my response was nearly immediate. When she got me mad, I felt the need to strike her.

I started to hit her with my fist, but she dodged the blow. When I took another step near her, she raised the champagne bottle a couple of inches. I stepped back and tripped over the ice bucket which had rolled toward my feet. I hit the floor hard. I expected Trina to laugh, but instead she continued to look at me coldly.

"Maybe that sums up the evening more accurately," she said.

I looked around for something to clobber her with. The ice bucket seemed to roll into my hands. I threw it at her. She made a move to get out of the way, but it did catch her on the hip.

"Jesus Christ! You son of a bitch!"

The bucket had bounced back, practically into my hands. I bobbled it, then came up swinging. She countered my move with a swing of the bottle, deflecting my blow, but knocking the bottle out of her hand. It fell on the bed. We both scrabbled for it. She came up with it, holding it triumphantly, as if she were about to christen a ship.

"Don't come near me!"

"Don't you prod me any further. I could kill you."

"Try it."

"Don't think I won't."

"I do think you won't."

I lunged for her and grabbed the bottle out of her hands. As hard as I could, to show her I meant business, I threw the bottle against the wall. It smashed and we ducked the flying pieces. The little champagne left in the bottle made a dripping spot on the wallpaper.

The bottle crashed against their wall with such force that I flinched, expecting it to burst through the flimsy wall at me. The sound of it troubled me. I had suggested a violent quarrel, but it seemed to me that there was something wrong — something all too real was the phrase that occurred to me — about what was happening in Room 412. I had not been ready for this particular type of quarrel; that is, the kind that normally develops between sexual or marital partners of some duration. Then I realized — this may have been their first night together, but they had experienced a rather long and complicated relationship in their dreams about each other. A relationship that had been fostered and formed by me.

For the first time I felt a sense of danger.

I decided to rush to the hallway

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phone. I should have used my room phone.

Even though I moved backward as Harry threw the bottle, a flying piece of glass managed to carom off something and hit me in the cheek. I could feel the blood streaming out, but couldn't tell whether it was a serious cut. It did not make any difference whether it was a serious cut. I knew what I wanted to do.

Harry was momentarily shocked by what he had done. He just stared at the dark splotch on the wall. I wiped blood away from my face and looked down at the floor. The neck of the bottle was still intact — it ran down to where two sharp knifelike fragments seemed to point directly at me. I picked up the piece of bottle gingerly. Harry did not notice.

"You bitch!" he whispered. "How could you do this to me?"

I ran at him, the piece of bottle in my hand, its two sharp points pointed directly at his face.

I almost did not see her coming. When I did, I was paralyzed. I had time to move, but I could not. I did not feel the points of the bottle cut me, but something in my brain must have responded, since I passed out.

I should have stopped when he fell, but I wanted to scar him so badly that I kept at it. Almost ritualistically, without feeling. It was terrible. I don't remember when I dropped the broken bottle, or anything past the first and second times I stabbed him. The memory has been modified and ameliorated, like a cleansing dream. After the dream, the police came.

I heard them talking above me. They spoke as if I were a corpse. When the attending doctor came, I heard him say to one of the cops that I had little chance of survival. That something important seemed to have been severed. I tried to scream something at him, but I could not even move.

A policeman came to me and said he would probably die. I asked, who? Your man, he said. My man, I said, isn't that a song by Fanny Brice? Then he asked me if I knew of any reason why a tape recorder should be attached to the head of our bed. Muzak? I asked.

I sat in the dark in Room 414 and strained to hear what I could, but after they said the wife had been notified, I sneaked out.

The next day I canceled my appointments and remained in my office. Early in the afternoon I suddenly remembered that I had

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left all my materials, plus some key notes, in the hotel room. I hurried to the Carzon. When I arrived at the room, racing past the normal-looking door of 412, I found everything was as I had left it. Only logical, there was no reason for the police to investigate the adjacent room. I vaguely remembered a knock on my door the evening before, but the room was dark and I stayed quiet and my caller went away.

I took my materials, checked out, and returned to my office, where I sat out the rest of the afternoon. Finally, at about seven, I called Marilee.

"Doctor who?" Marilee said.

"Dr. Woods. Dr. Bob Woods."

"Oh. Oh, yes. What can I do for you?"

"I called to see how your husband was. I saw the paper, you see, and ...."

"He's surviving, for the moment. But they don't hold out much hope."

She said all this matter-of-factly, nothing like a bereaved wife. I was encouraged.

I called back the next day. He was still surviving, Marilee still reported it coldly. And the following day, on page five of the newspaper, was the story of Harry's death. I phoned Marilee.

"Doctor who?"

"Dr. Woods. Dr. Bob Woods."

"Yes, of course. It is kind of you to call. Will we see you tonight?"

I felt a surge of hope and joy.

"I will see you anytime, Marilee, you know that. I've not forgotten. I've never forgotten."

There was a long pause.

"Doctor, I am sure you've not forgotten. Memory is a kind salve in such times as these. I meant, will we see you at the funeral home tonight?"

"The ... the funeral home?"

"Yes."

"Um, yes. No."

"As you wish. They have done a marvelous cosmetic job on him. He will be as you knew him."

"What are you saying, Marilee? How can you spout funeral jargon at a time like this?"

Another long pause.

"It seems ... it seems that funeral jargon might be appropriate at such a time, Dr. Woods."

"I meant —"

"I know what you meant. Harry would be happy at your paying your last respects. In his last days, most of his energies were centered on you. You were doing a tremendous amount of good, Dr. Woods. Even the girl...but let that pass. I won't be unkind to his memory. Good-bye, Dr. Woods."

"Wait!"

She had not hung up. I could hear her breathing.

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"You sent Harry to me."

"I believe that is true. He expressed some need for help, and naturally ...."

"You sent him to me!"

"I sent him to you. And you did him a world of good. We thank you, Dr. Woods, and please send me any outstanding bills, but right now my time is —"

"I love you, Marilee."

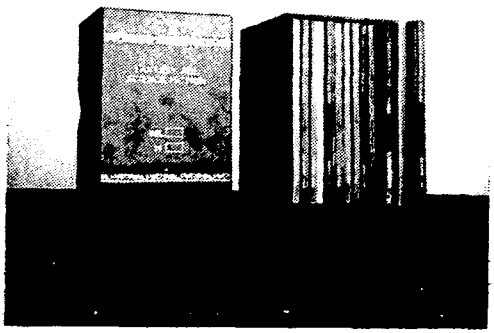
"That may be, Dr. Woods. That very well may be."

"You planned this!"

But she had hung up and had not heard what I had said.

The damn bitch probably never intended to come back to me. Or else she was playing it cold, until a decent interval had passed.

I would call her again in a few days.



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H. P. LOVECRAFT AND OTHERS ... the salutary effect of chastity upon life in a commercial establishment

Howard Phillips Lovecraft of Providence (1890-1937) was a man endowed with proofs that he was undesirable. His father died in a madhouse when the child was young. His mother raised him according to her best ability to cope rationally with the world and then died in the same place.

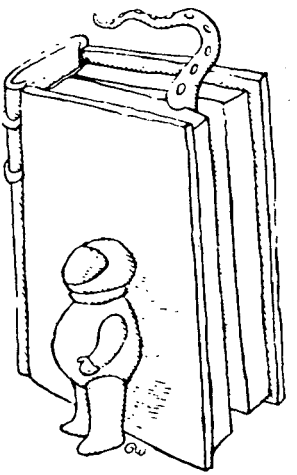
In his life, Lovecraft wrote a little fantasy and science fiction that have made him famous and controversial. He did it the way dentists campaign MGBs in weekend sports car competition, or the way the chief operating officer of the Yellow Pages' printing company runs 1/5-size steam trains on 12 miles of track in his back yard. He sold essentially to only one publication *Weird Tales*, whose editor also behaved like a hobbyist, treated Lovecraft like dirt, and thus made him feel right at home.

For a living, Lovecraft sold 'revisions.' That is, he was a ghost writer for pamphlets signed by pillpushers and philosophists. He also did massive rewrites on would-be stories from people who wanted to see their bylines in print, and who also managed to keep

ALGIS BUDRYS

Books

Lovecraft, A Biography, L. Sprague de Camp, Doubleday, $10.00.



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most of the proceeds. In addition, he had a small, diminishing mortgage income. He planned to take poison when the money ran out.

The rest of the time, he loved ice cream, wheedled psychic sustenance from his surviving female relatives, wore his dead salesman-father's clothes, and got the idea he ought to have been an 18th-century gentleman. He dropped out of school, educated himself out of musty libraries, was probably an outright genius, and wrote incessantly. He wrote for amateur magazines; in fact, he consumed a lifetime's worth of energy at that occupation alone, and if science fiction amateur journalism has a father, it can claim him. He wrote critical essays, poems by the kilometer, and tens of thousands of letters. Somehow, he made many friends in person, and generated compound scores of admirers by mail. Among the latter were a disproportionate number of young would-be writers, who found — as many another has — that those who do not have time, teach.

He thought he was ugly. He slept days, had clammy hands, and we laugh at him often these days for inventing 'eldritch horror.'

One wonders if he was like the dentist and the printer — Oh, it's drill, drill, drill, print, print, print, go to the bank, five days a week, Here comes Saturday! Put on the funny cap! Damn, here's Monday. One suspects that like the dentist in the pits, the printer at the throttle, HPL often became confused as to which of him he was being, and, to clear his head to his own satisfaction, had to give himself sharp jolts of remembering who he ought to be.

He had only one abiding satisfaction toward the end of his short life: His intestinal cancer was making great headway in gnawing him free of the 20th century.

Much of this is the stuff of legend among fantasy and sf fans. All of it, and much more besides, is now to be found expressed or implied in *Lovecraft.* A biography by L. Sprague De Camp, (Doubleday & Company, Garden City, NY, 1975. 510 pp., cloth — or, rather, embossed paper over stiff cardboard — $10.00).

A portion of the text appeared here earlier. The complete book is meticulous, exhaustive, and occasionally flashed with revelations of De Camp reacting to the style of the young Lovecraft:

"In 'The Crawling Chaos,' [wherein the viewpoint character describes adventures in a dream landscape] the narrator flees inland, taking his adjectives with him."

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Doubleday's editors have done De Camp some disservices. In a book of such size and scope, there are bound to be some inconsistencies, but a few seem large enough to have been queried and clarified. Passages on Pages 2 and 11, for instance, contradict each other on the age at death of Lovecraft's mother. One goes ten pages wondering how she had time to so profoundly thrust her child backward 150 years in intellectual development.

But the book as a whole is clearly definitive, properly indexed and annotated, richly researched, and a fitting monument to Lovecraft's importance.

And what does that importance amount to? Well, opinion vacillates. He is, for instance, the only fantasy writer (except, perhaps, Jefferson) known to have a rock group named after him. Or, though his work was never collected in boards during his life, by 1947 clever marketing had driven the collectors' price of *The Outsider and Others* to $100, and it is now into its fourth hundred. More revelatory in contemporary times is the fact that you cannot fully appreciate the creativity of Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream,* or of George R.R. Martin's recent novelettes, without reference to HPL. More important to an earlier generation was his avuncular, instructive correspondence with such aspiring youngsters as Henry Kuttner and Robert Bloch, and his stamp upon the early fantasy of Theodore Sturgeon and Ray Bradbury.

I venture that few would-be fantasy or science fiction writers have ignored his work. He is such a *bete noir,* so much the bean our noses have been warned against, that the temptation to dip into, say, "The Dunwich Horror" or "The Color out of Space" becomes overwhelming. At times, in the case of the young, literally so.

I remember exclaiming to myself 'Jesus, I can do *that!*' and immediately whistling off reams of derivative prose and poetry to markets which failed to get the point. I was, in fact, almost 16 before I said 'There's more to writing than imagery,' and quite a bit older before I believed it.

And, even so, I was still mis-stating my semiperception. What I called 'imagery' — what we all called imagery when we found it in Lovecraft or saw the very young Bradbury adopting it from the young Sturgeon — is exactly its opposite. Almost to the end of his career, H.P. Lovecraft in his stubborn, self-taught, assiduous way clung to a naive confusion between the use of words as symbols to create a systematic progression of fully visible scenes in the

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readers mind, and of words simply as sounds with which to braid skeins of perfervid declaration.

The babbling, fainting narrator of the typical Lovecraft tale does not act to show the reader's imagination a story. He files a passionate affidavit that something traumatic happened to him. His assertions are sometimes intricate, near unto poetry, and evocative. They have to be eloquent; we see no proof they are not lies.

By being its foremost popularizer, H.P. Lovecraft is entitled to credit for 'inventing' the First Person Delirious technique. He was not, except incidently, an author of the horrible, the fey, or the wonderful. He was a descriptor of an attitude — the attitude of a child left to sleep all alone in a crannied, creaking house.

His personal writing style is a unicycle of an invention — grotesquely entertaining, inefficiently transportative. Damon Knight first pointed out the dramatic preferability of the horror shown to the horror asserted. De Camp makes the same observation. George R.R. Martin's present major strength lies in using Lovecraftian settings, but peopling them with characters who react only pragmatically to the always well-described features of their predicament. Kuttner, Bloch, Sturgeon, Bradbury, and countless others who were at first taken with this technique, gradually or swiftly abandoned it. Bradbury's mid-1940s folksy vampire tales in *Mademoiselle,* for example, or his cinematically graphic horror stories set in Mexico, are absolute reversals of his equally skilled earlier *Weird Tales* work, in which he had clearly been out to push Lovecraft's footsteps as far as he could make them go.

Even Lovecraft's last sales were to *Astounding Stories,* with good stories rejected by *Weird,** which seemed unable to cope with some new dimension in a writer it had always monopolized.

And then Lovecraft died. He is mourned by his surviving personal friends and correspondents, worshiped by the partisans of his work, libeled by its detractors, snickered at, and, I think, not given enough credit for some of his subtler contributions to the progress of fantasy and especially to that of science fiction.

Nor was he as strange as all that, given his conditions. He was the heavily neurotic child of his parents, but he displayed no true psychoses of his own. He was

**This late and sometimes justifiably lamented pulp was a humorless fantasy magazine, idiosyncratically edited and published. Its appearance and content in the 1930s are easily worth a psychologist's doctorate. AJB*

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withdrawn, often in fear and hence given to grotesque behavior, and yet was quite amiably social in situations he could understand.

The paramount thing about him was that he was an individual of high intelligence who happened to regard the 19th and 20th centuries as objects of curiosity and study. He was a gentleman as Thomas Jefferson was a gentleman; that is, he was an amateur.

Recent cultural — Edwardian — misperceptions to the contrary, the difference between the amateur and the professional is not the matter of money. It is, solely and entirely, the ability to choose not to win.

In the practice of the world, this subtle truth not necessarily but usually works itself out as comparative breadth of proficiency.

The professional practices nothing in his craft that does not lead directly toward winning. He studies technique until no event is truly unexpected or fully out of control. This takes a great deal of concentration, and expends time the amateur cannot spare from his profession. By going out on the track, the dentist is declaring a willingness to experience moments when he is not in a rational configuration. This willingness is what no professional can abide, forgetting his own beginnings.

In writing, the amateur is the one who writes for himself and discovers a coterie of like-minded people. The professional is one who at least cursorily knows everything that might be done, knows what he cannot do, explores among the choices remaining open to him, and delivers on demand for an audience of his own choosing.

The practical distinction between writers is ultimately determined by the amateur's love of spontaneity; by the reward of looking down at the page and discovering what it is one had in mind. Since spontaneous productions cannot be objectively distinguished from a professional's skilled preselections, only the writer has this joy. It is pure and personal. Furthermore, any expression of approval for his work is automatically a direct and meaningful approval of him. Any disapproval, of course, is a personal affront. Lovecraft behaved like a textbook case of this syndrome, exaggerated for clarity of effect.

The amateur writer, like Lovecraft, may be able to market his work for money. The products of his gift may in fact be more attractive to some than the results of a professional's skill. In that case, he becomes a figure of intense interest to professionals, and whatever he has found within

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himself becomes a topic of common study, of adaptation to the general techniques of other wrtiers, and of assimilation into the main body of commercial expertise. This adoptive process is most intense among those who don't yet have much vested interest in a track record of their own — that is, the young.

A most conspicuous thing that has come to us and can be traced to Lovecraft is that love of language, expressed both as vocabulary and as poetic effect in prose. It is now used in carefully measured ways to reinforce, but not conflict with, the scene-by-scene advancement of the scenario. Love of language is itself part of an old tradition in fantasy, derived from early Victorian book publication for an aristocratic audience. With all due respect to a particular few exceptions, there was no such tradition in 'modern' pulp sf until it was popularized, made frequent, and ultimately made commonplace by Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Henry Kuttner, and C. L. Moore, all *Weird Tales* emmigrants, among others clearly exposed not so much to exactly what Lovecraft did but to the effect of it. To be struck in the eye by a word like 'eldritch' is at least to be made aware that there *are* more words than are normally heard in the street or found in school textbooks written down to the level of the uneducated.

There were then further consequences. Bradbury, Sturgeon, *et al*, seem to have simultaneously realized that the way to take the ludicrous out of complex language is to have it perform complex tasks; to speak to the impulses, the vanities, the little and large fears, the hopes and regrets which are universal to mankind, but of which category fiction had hitherto made only postures and declamations.

'Modern' science fiction around the turn of the '40s was — again with certain outstanding but isolated exceptions — being produced by people who were professional scientists but amateur writers. They took an engineering approach to the conception, design and execution of a story. This meant, since they were intelligent and sincere, that they brought the level of plotting up well beyond that of any other category form, including the detective story in all but a very few hands. Nevertheless, it was solder, solder, solder, five days a week. They learned to write from what they liked to read, and their educations outside their professional specialties were necessarily narrow.

But for the heirs of H.P. Lovecraft, the humanities were necessarily part of their profession.

The consequences of making science fiction an art form are not yet fully understood, nor always

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appreciated. When appreciated, they have not always been interpreted to any visibly worthwhile purpose. But all these value judgments are irrelevant; the thing has happened. The traditions of the engineer-writers have been combined with the traditions of the man who saw himself as the last dweller in the ruins of the Age of Reason. These in turn were melded with the purposeful social comment of H. G. Wells, as brought forward by writers like Frederick Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth, who never sold to *Astounding* during the Golden Age but sprang forth in post war sf like the fully matured and thoroughly apprenticed professionals they had been.

In fact, it appears that the science fiction of today has three essential progenitors: Wells, the draper's assistant; John W. Campbell, Jr., the B.S. in physics at the engineering laboratories of the White Motor Truck Company; and Howard Phillips Lovecraft, gentleman. Mr. Wells and Mr. Campbell rather quickly in their lives became professionals, and did the life work that resulted in a rather good market for a reasonable number of talented weekend writers working for a circumscribed audience in a little bit of a cultural way-station.

It was H.P. Lovecraft, it seems, who provided the one more thing that results in his teeming edifice we see about us.

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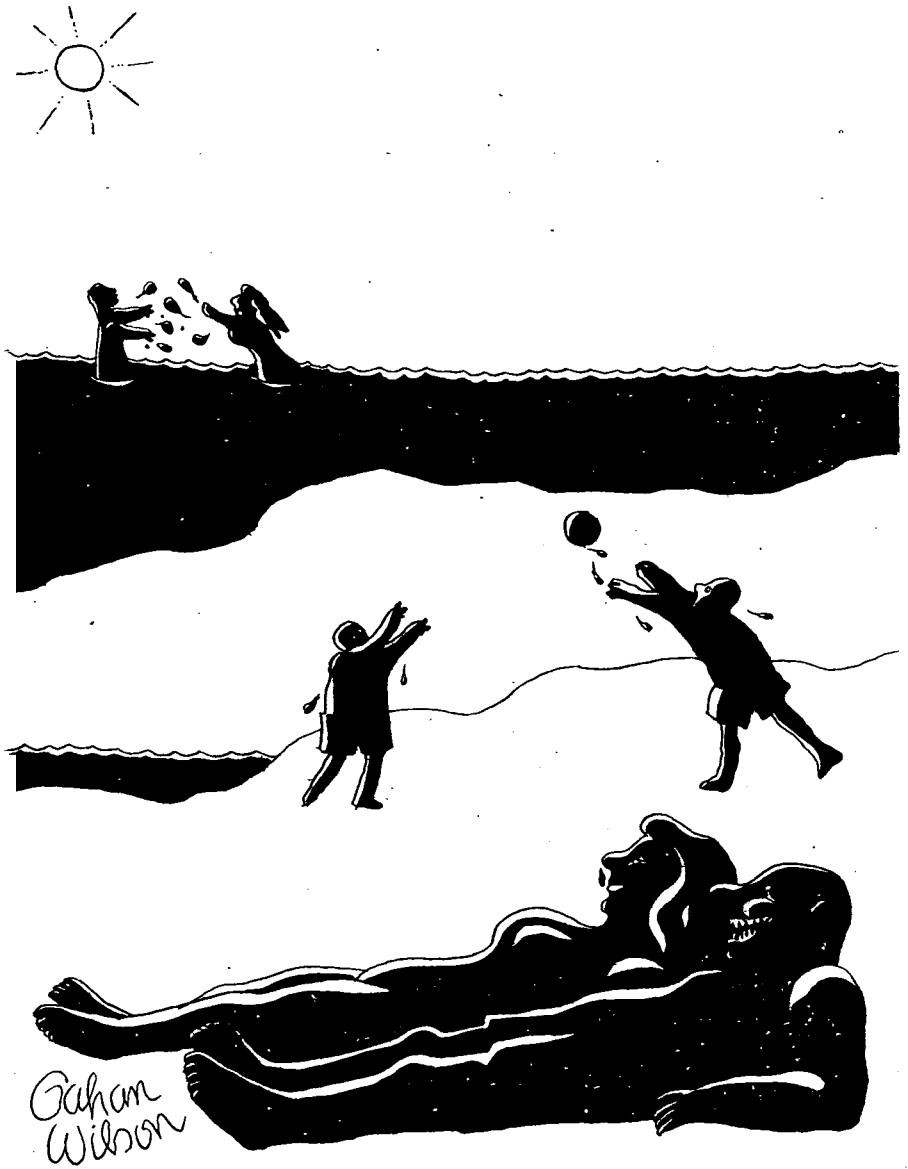
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"Remember when we used to let the oil slick get us down?"

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Brian Lumley has established himself as a first-rate practitioner of the horror tale, and here is his latest.

No Way Home

by BRIAN LUMLEY

If you motor up the M1 past Lanchester from London and come off before Bankhead heading west across the country, within a very few miles you enter an area of gently rolling green hills, winding country roads and Olde Worlde villages with quaint wooden-beamed street-corner pubs and noonday cats atop leaning ivied walls. The roads there are narrow, climbing gently up and ribboning down the green hills, rolling between fields, meandering casually through woods and over brick-and wooden-bridged streams; the whole background forms a pattern of peace and tranquillity rarely disturbed over the centuries.

By night, though, the place takes on a different aspect. An almost miasmal aura of timelessness, of antiquity, hangs over the brooding woods and dark hamlets. The moon silvers winding hedgerows and ancient thatched roofs, and when the pubs close and the last lights blink out in farm and cottage windows, then it is as if Night had thrown her blackest cloak over the land, when even the most powerful headlight's beam penetrates the resultant darkness only with difficulty. Enough to allow you to drive, if you drive slowly and carefully.

Strangers motoring through this region — even in daylight hours — are known occasionally to lose their way, to drive the same labyrinthine lanes for hours on end in meaningless circles. The contours of the countryside often seem to defy even the most accurate sense of direction, and the roads and tracks never quite seem to tally with printed maps of the area. There are rumors almost as old as the area itself that persons have been known to pass into oblivion here — like grey smoke from cottage chimney stacks disappear-

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ing into air — never to come out again.

Not that George Benson was a stranger. True, he had not been home to England for many years — since running off as a youth, later to marry and settle in Germany — but as a boy he had known this place like the back of his hand and must have cycled for thousands of miles along dusty summer roads, lanes and tracks, even bridle paths through the heart of this very region.

And that was why he was so perturbed now, not because of a pack of lies and fairy stories and old wives' tales heard as a boy, but because this *was* his home territory, where he'd been born and reared. Indeed, he felt more than perturbed, stupid almost. A fellow drives all the way north through Germany from Dortmund, catches the car ferry from Bremerhaven into Harwich, rolls on upcountry, having made the transition from right- to left-of-the-road driving with only a very small effort ... and then hopelessly loses himself within only a fistful of miles from home!

Anger at his own supposed stupidity turned to bitter memories of his wife and then to an even greater anger. And a hurt....

It didn't hurt half so much now, though, not now it was all over. But the anger was still there. And the memories of the milk of marriage gone sour. Greta had just up and left home one day. George, employing the services of a detective agency, had traced his wife to Hamburg, where he'd found her in the bed of a nightclub crooner, an old boyfriend who finally had made it good.

"Damn all Krauts!" George cursed now as he checked the speed of his car to read out the legend on a village name board. His headlights picked the letters out starkly in the surrounding darkness. "Middle Hamborough? — Never bloody heard of it!" Again he cursed as, making a quick decision, he spun the steering wheel to turn his big car about on the narrow road. He would have to start backtracking, something he hated doing because it seemed so inefficient, so wasteful. "And blast and damn all Kraut cars!" he added as his front wheels bounced jarringly onto and back off the high stone roadside curb.

"Greta!" he quietly growled to himself as he drove back down the road away from the outskirts of Middle Hamborough. "What a *bitch!*" For of course she had blamed him for their troubles, saying that she couldn't stand his meanness. Him, George Benson, mean! She simply hadn't appreciated money. She'd thought that Deutsche marks grew on trees, that pfennigs gathered like dew on the

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grass in the night. George, on the other hand, had inherited much of the pecuniary instincts of his father, a Yorkshireman of the Old School — and of Scottish stock to boot — who really understood the value of "brass." His old man had used to say: "Thee tak care o' the pennies, Georgie, an' the pounds'll tak care o' theysels!"

George's already pinched face tightened skull-like as his thoughts again returned to Greta. She had wanted children. Children! Damned lucky thing he had known better than to accept *that!* For God's sake, who could afford children? Then she'd complained about the food — like she'd been complaining for years — said she was getting thin because the money he gave her was never enough. But George liked his women willowy and fragile; that way there was never much fight in them. Well, he'd certainly misjudged Greta, there had been plenty of fight left in her. And their very last fight had been about food, too. He had wanted her to buy food in bulk at the supermarkets for cheapness; in turn she'd demanded a deep freezer so that the food she bought wouldn't go bad; finally George had gone off the deep end when she told him how much the freezer she had in mind would cost!

She left him that same day; moreover, she ate the last of the *wurstchen* before she went! George grinned mirthlessly as he gripped the steering wheel tighter, wishing it were Greta's scrawny neck. By God! She'd be sorry when she was fat!

Still, George had had the last laugh. Their home had been paid for fifty-fifty, but it had been in George's name. He had sold it. Likewise the furniture and the few clothes she left behind. The car had been half hers, too — but again in George's name, for Greta couldn't drive. It was all his now, his money, his car, everything. As he'd done so often in the last twenty-four hours, he took one hand from the wheel to reassuringly pat the fat wallet where its outline bulged out the upper right front of his jacket.

It was the thought of money that sent George's mind casting back an hour or so to a chance encounter at Harvey's All-Night-Grill, just off the M1. This drunk had been there — oh, a real joker and melancholy with it, too — but he had been *sooo* well-heeled! George remembered the man's queer offer: "Just show me the way home, that's all — and all I've got you can have!" And he had carried a bankbook showing a credit of over two thousand pounds....

That last was hearsay, though, passed on to George by Harvey himself, the stubble-jawed, greasy-aproned owner of the place. Now

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that earlier accidental meeting and conversation suddenly jumped up crystal clear in George's mind. It had started when George mentioned to Harvey that he was heading for Bellington; that was when the other fellow had started to take an interest in him and had made his weird offer about being shown the way home.

God damn! George sat bolt upright behind the steering wheel. Come to think of it, he had heard of Middle Hamborough before. Surely that was the name of the place the drunk had been looking for — for fifteen years!

George hadn't paid much attention to the man at the time, had barely listened to his gabbled, drunken pleading. He'd passed the man off quite simply as some nut who'd heard those fanciful old rumours about people getting lost in the surrounding countryside, a drunk who was making a big play of his own personal little fantasy. The fellow would be all right when he sobered up ....

Now that George thought about it, though — well, why should anyone make up a story like that? And come to think of it, the man hadn't seemed all that drunk. More tired and, well, *lost,* really ....

Just then, cresting a low hill, as his headlights flashed across the next shallow valley, George saw the house with the big garden and the long drive winding up to it. The place stood to the right of the road, atop the next hill, and the gravel drive rose up from an ornamental stone arch and iron gate at the roadside. Dipping down the road and climbing the low hill, George read the wrought-iron legend on the gate: "High House!" And now he remembered more of the — drunk's? — story.

The man had called himself Kent, and fifteen years ago, on his tenth wedding anniversary, he'd left home one morning to drive to London, there to make certain business arrangements with city-dwelling colleagues. He had taken a fairly large sum of money with him when he drove from High House, the home he himself had designed and built, which had worked out just as well for him. Turning right off the Middle Hamborough road through Meadington and onto the London road at Bankhead, Kent had driven to the city. And in London —

Kent was a partner in a building concern ... or at least he had been. For in London he discovered that his firm had never existed, that his colleagues, Milton and Jones, while they themselves were real enough, swore they had never heard of him. "Milton, Jones & Kent" did not exist; the firm was known simply as "Milton & Jones." Not only did they not know him,

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they tried to have him jailed for attempted fraud!

That was only the start of it, for the real horror came when he tried to get back home — only to discover that there just wasn't any way home! George remembered now Kent's apparently drunken phrase: "A strange dislocation of space and time, a crossing of probability tracks, a passage between parallel dimensions — and a subsequent *snapping-back* of space-time elastic ..." Only a drunk would say something like that. A drunk or a nut.

Except Harvey had insisted that Kent was sober. He was just tired, Harvey said, confused, half mad trying to solve a fifteen-year-old problem that wasn't .... There had never been a Middle Hamborough, Harvey insisted. The place wasn't shown on any map; you couldn't find it in the telephone directory; no trains, buses or roads went there. Middle Hamborough wasn't!

But Middle Hamborough *was,* George had seen it, or —

Could it be that greasy old Harvey had somehow been fooling that clown all these years, milking his money drop by drop, cashing in on some mental block or other? Or had they both simply been pulling George's leg? If so, well, it certainly seemed a queer sort of joke...

George glanced at his watch. Just on 11:00 p.m.

Damn it, he'd planned to be in Bellington by now, at home with the old folks, and he would have been if he'd come off the M1 at the right place. Of course, when he'd left England there had been no motorway as such, just another road stretching away north and south. That was where he'd gone wrong, obviously; he'd come off the M1 too soon. He should have gone on to the next exit. Well, all right, he'd kill two birds with one stone. He'd go back to Harvey's all-nighter, check out the weird one's story again, then see if he couldn't perhaps latch on to some of the joker's change to cover his time. Then he'd try to pick up a map of the area before heading home. He couldn't go wrong with a map, now could he?

Having decided his course, and considering the winding roads and pitch darkness, George put his foot down and sped back to Harvey's place. Parking his car, he walked through the open door into the unhealthy atmosphere and lighting of the so-called cafeteria (where the lights were kept low, George suspected, to make the young cockroaches on the walls less conspicuous). He went straight to the service counter and carefully rested his elbows upon it, avoiding the splashes of sticky coffee and spilled grease. Of the equally greasy proprietor he casually

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enquired regarding Mr. Kent's whereabouts.

"Eh? Kent? He'll be in his room. I let him lodge here, y'know. He doesn't like to be too far from this area...."

"You *let* him lodge here?" George asked, raising his eyebrows questioningly.

"Well, y'know, he pays a bit."

George nodded, silently repeating the other's words: Yeah, I'll *bet* he pays a bit!

"G'night there!" Harvey waved a stained dishcloth at a departing truck driver and his mate. "See y'next time." He turned back to George with a scowl. "Anyway, what's it to you, about Kent? After making y'self a quick quid or two?"

"How do you mean?" George returned, assuming a hurt look. "It's just that I think I might be able to help the poor bloke out, that's all."

"Oh?" Harvey looked suspicious. "How's that, then?"

"Well, half an hour ago I was on the road to Middle Hamoborough, and I passed a place set back off the road called High House. I just thought —"

"'Ere," Harvey cut in, a surprisingly fast hand shooting out to catch George's jacket front and pull him close so that their faces almost met across the service counter. "You tryin' t' be clever, chief?"

"Well, I'll be —" George spluttered, genuinely astonished. "What the hell d'you think you're—"

"'Cos if you are — you an' me'll fall out, we will!"

George carefully disengaged himself. "Well," he said, "I think that answers one of my questions, at least."

"Eh? What d'you mean?" Harvey asked, still looking surly. George backed off a step.

"Looks to me like you're as mad as him, attacking me like that. I mean, I might have expected you to laugh, seeing as how I fell for your funny little joke — but I'd hardly think that you'd get all physical."

"What the 'ell are you on about?" Harvey questioned, a very convincing frown creasing his forehead. "What joke?"

"Why, about Middle Hamborough, about it not being on any map and about no roads going there and Kent looking for the place for fifteen years. I'm on about a place that's not twenty minutes' fast drive from here, signposted clear as the City of London!"

Suddenly Harvey's unwashed features paled visibly. "You mean you've actually *seen* this place?" he whispered. "And you drove past ... High House?"

"Damn right!" George answered abruptly feeling as though things were all unreal, a very vivid

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but meaningless daydream.

Harvey lifted a flap in the counter and waddled through to George's side. He was a very big man, George suddenly noticed, and the color had come back to his face with a vengeance. There was a red, angry tinge in the man's sallow features now; moreover, the cafeteria was quite empty of other souls, all bar the two of them.

"Now look here —" George blurted, as Harvey began to maneuver him into a corner.

"I shouldn't 'ave mentioned 'is money, should I?" the fat man cut him off, his piggy eyes fastening upon those of his patently intended victim, making his question more a statement than a question proper.

"See," he continued, "I'd had a couple of pints earlier, or I wouldn't 'ave let it drop about 'is predicament. 'E's been right good to me, Mr. Kent 'as — 'elped me set this place up proper, 'e did — and I don't cotton to the idea of some flyboy trying to —"

Again his arm shot out, and he grabbed Benson's throat this time, trapping him in the dim corner. "So you've been down the road to Middle Hamborough, 'ave you? — And you've seen High House, eh? Well, let me tell you, I've been looking for that place close on six years, me an' poor ol' Kent, an' not so much as a peep!

"Now I knows 'e's a bit of a nut, but I *like* 'im and we gets on fine. 'E stays 'ere, cheap like, an' we do a bit of motorin' in'is old car — lookin' for those places you say you've seen, y'know? But we never finds 'em, an' we never will, 'cos they're not there, see? Kent being a decent little gent, I 'umors 'im and things is OK. But I'm no crook, if you see what I mean, though I'm not sure I can say the same for everybody!" He peered pointedly at George, releasing the pressure on his windpipe enough for him to croak:

"I tell you I *have* seen High House; or, at least, I saw a place of that name and answering that description I heard from Kent. And I *have* been on the road to —"

"What's that about High House?" The question was a hoarse, quavering whisper — hesitant, and yet filled with excited expectancy. Hearing that whisper, Harvey immediately released his grip on Benson's neck and turned to move over quickly to the thin, grey-haired, middle-aged man who had appeared out of a back room behind the service counter.

"Don't get yourself all upset, Mr. Kent," Harvey protested, holding up his hands solicitously. "It's just some bloke tryin' to pull a fast one —"

"But I heard him say —" Kent's eyes were wide, staring past the fat proprietor straight at

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Benson where he stood, still shaken, in the corner.

George found his voice again. "I said I'd seen High House, on the road to Middle Hamborough — and I did see it." He shook himself, straightening his tie and shrugging his disarranged jacket back into position. "But I didn't come back in here to get involved with a couple of nuts. And I don't think much of your joke."

George turned away and made for the door; then, remembering his previous trouble, he turned back to face Harvey. "Do you have a map of the area by any chance? I've been in Germany for some years and seem to be out of touch. I can't seem to find my way about any more."

For a moment Kent continued to stare very hard at the speaker; then he half turned to Harvey. "He — he got *lost!* And he says he's seen High House ...! I've got to believe him; I daren't miss the chance that—"

Almost sure by now that he was the victim of some cockeyed leg-pull (and yet still experiencing niggling little subconscious doubts), George Benson shrugged. "OK. No map," he grumbled. "Well, good night boys. Maybe I'll drop in again some time — like next visiting day!"

"No, wait!" the thin man cried. "Do you think that you can find ... that you can find High House again?" His voice went back to a whisper on the last half dozen words.

"Sure, I can find it again," George told him, nodding his head. "But it's well out of my way."

"I'll make it worth your trouble," Kent quickly answered, his voice rising rapidly in what sounded to George like a bad case of barely suppressed hysteria. "I'll make it very worth while indeed!"

George was not the man to pass up a good thing. "My car's outside," he said. "Do you want to ride with me, or will you follow in your own car?"

"I'll ride with you. My hands are shaking so badly that I —"

"I'm coming with you," Harvey suddenly grunted, taking off his greasy apron.

"No, no, my friend," Kent turned to him. "If we don't find High House, I'll be back. Until then, and just in case we do find it, this is for all you've done." His hand was shaking badly as he took out a checkbook and quickly, nervously scribbled. He passed the check to Harvey, and George managed to get a good look at it. His eyes went wide when he saw the amount it was made out for. Five hundred pounds!

"Now look 'ere, Mr. Kent," Harvey blustered. "I don't like the looks of this bloke. I reckon —"

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"I understand your concern," the older man told him, "but I'm sure Mr. —?" he turned to George.

"Er, Smith," George told him, unwilling to reveal his real name. This could still be some crazy joke, but if so, it would be on some bloke called 'Smith,' and not on George Benson!

"I'm sure that Mr. Smith is legitimate. And in any case I daren't miss the chance to get ... to get back home." He was eager now to be on his way. "Are you ready, Mr. Smith?"

"Just as soon as you say," George told him. "The sooner the better."

They walked out into the night, to George's car, leaving fat greasy Harvey worriedly squeezing his hands in the doorway to his all-nighter. Suddenly the night air seemed inordinately cold, and as George opened the passenger door to let Kent get in, he shivered. He walked round the car, climbed into the driver's seat and slammed the door.

As George started up the motor, Kent spoke up from where he crouched against the opposite door, a huddled shape in the dark interior of the car. "Are you sure that — that —"

"Look," George answered, the utter craziness of the whole business abruptly dawning on him, souring his voice, "if this is some sort of nutty joke...." He let the threat hang, then snapped, "Of course I can find it again. High House, you're talking about?"

"Yes, yes. High House. The home I built for the woman who lives there, waiting for me."

"For fifteen years?" George allowed himself to indulge in the other's fantasy.

"She would wait until time froze!" Kent leaned over to spit the words in George's ear. "And in any case, I have a theory."

Yeah! George thought to himself. *Me, too!* Out loud he said, "A theory?"

"Yes. I think — I hope — it's possible that time itself *is* frozen at the moment of the fracture. If I can get back, it may all be unchanged. I may even regain my lost years!"

"A parallel dimension, eh?" George said, feeling strangely nervous.

"Right," his passenger nodded emphatically. "That's the way I see it."

Humoring him, George asked, "What's it like, this other world of yours?"

"Why, it's just like this world — except that there's a village called Middle Hamborough, and a house on a hill, and a building firm called Milton, Jones & Kent. There are probably other differences, too, but I haven't found any yet to concern me. Do you know the

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theory of parallel worlds?"

"I've read some science fiction," George guardedly answered. "Some of these other dimensions, or whatever they're supposed to be, are just like this world. Maybe a few odd differences, like you say. Others are different, completely different. Horrible and alien — stuff like that." He suddenly felt stupid. "That's what I've read, anyway. Load of rubbish!"

"Rubbish?" Kent grunted, stirring in his seat. "I wish it were. But, anyway, you've got the right idea. Why are you stopping?"

"See that sign?" George said, pointing through the windshield to where the headlights lit up a village name board. "Meadington, just a few miles down the road. We're through Meadington in about five minutes. Then we turn left where it's signposted Middle Hamborough. Another five minutes after that and we're at High House. You said it would be worth my while?"

Now comes the crunch, George told himself. *This is where the idiot bursts out laughing — and that's where I brain him!*

But Kent didn't laugh. Instead he got out his checkbook, and George switched on the interior light to watch him write a note for....

George's eyes bulged as he saw the numbers go down on the crisp paper. First a one, followed by three zeros! One thousand pounds! "This won't bounce?" he asked suspiciously, his hand trembling as he reached for the check.

"It won't bounce," said Kent, folding the note and tucking it into his pocket. "Fortunately, my money was good for this world, too. You get it when we get to High House."

"You have a deal," George told him, putting the car in gear. They drove through slumbering Meadington, its roofs and hedges silvered in a moonlight that shone through the promise of a mist. Leaving the village behind, the car speed along the country road, but after a few minutes George again pulled into the curb and stopped. His passenger had slumped down in his seat.

"Are you OK?" George asked.

"There's no turnoff," Kent sobbed. "We should have passed it before now. I've driven down this road a thousand, ten thousand times in the last fifteen years, and tonight it's just the same as it always is. There's no turnoff, no signpost to Middle Hamborough!"

"Yeah," George chewed his lip, unwilling to accept defeat so easily. "We must have missed it. It wasn't this far out of Meadington last time." He turned the big car about, driving onto the grass verge to do so, then headed back towards Meadington.

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George was angry now and more than a little puzzled. He'd been watching for that signpost as keenly as his passenger. How the hell could they have missed it? No matter, this time he'd drive dead-slow. He knew the road was there, for he'd been down it and back once already tonight!

Sure enough, with the first of Meadington's roofs glimmering silver in the near-distance, a dilapidated signpost suddenly showed up in the beam of the car's lights. It pointed across the tarmac to where the surface of a second road ribboned away into the milky moonlight, a sign whose legend, though grimy, was nevertheless amply legible: Middle Hamborough.

And quite as suddenly George Benson's passenger was sitting bolt upright in his seat, his whole body visibly trembling while his eyes stood out like organ stops, staring madly at the signpost. "Middle Hamborough!" he cried, his voice pitched so high it almost broke. And again: "Middle Hamborough, Middle Hamborough!"

"Sure," said George, an unnatural chill racing up his spine. "I told you I could find it!" And to himself he added, *But I'm damned if I know how we missed it the first time!*

He turned onto the new road, noticing the second signpost at his right as he did so. That was the one they'd missed. Perhaps it had been in the shadows; but in any case, what odds? They were on the right road now.

Kent's trembling had stopped, and his voice was quite steady when he said, "You really don't know how much I owe you, Mr. Smith. You shall have your check, of course, but if it were for a million pounds, it wouldn't really be enough." His face was dark in the car's interior, and his silhouette looked different somehow.

George said, "You realize that fat Harvey's been having you on all this time, don't you?" His voice became quite gentle as he added, "You know, you really ought to see someone about it, about all ... *this*, I mean. People can take advantage of you. Harvey could have brought you here any time he wanted."

Suddenly Kent laughed, a young laugh that had the merest trace of weary hysteria in it. "Oh, you don't know the half of it, do you, Mr. Smith? Can't you get it through your head that I'm not mad and no one is trying to make a fool of you? This is all real. My story is the truth. I *was* lost in an alien dimension, in your world, but now I'm finally back in my own. You may believe me, Mr. Smith, that you have earned your thousand pounds!"

George was almost convinced.

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Certainly Kent was sincere enough. "Well, OK — whatever you say. But I'll tell you something, Mr. Kent. If that check of yours bounces when I try to cash it tomorrow, I'll be back, and you better believe I'll find High House again!"

The silhouette turned in its seat in an attitude of concern. "Do me a favor, will you, Mr. Smith? If — just *if,* you understand — if you can't find the road back to Meadington, don't hesitate to —"

George cut him off with a short bark of a laugh. "You must be joking! I'll find it, all right." His voice went hard again. "And I'll find you, too, if —"

But he paused as, at the top of the next low hill, the headlights illuminated a house standing above the road at the end of a winding drive. George's passenger suddenly gripped his elbow in terrific excitement. "High House!" Kent cried, his voice wild and exultant. 'High House! You've done it!"

George grunted in answer, revving the car down into the valley and up the hill to pull it to a halt outside the wrought-iron gates. He reached across to catch hold of his passenger's coat as Kent tried to scramble from the car. "Kent!"

"Oh, yes, your check," said the young man, turning to smile at George in the yellow light from the little lamp on the gate....

George's jaw dropped. Oh, this was Kent, all right. Little doubt about that. Same features, same suit (though it hung a little baggily on him now), same trembling hand that reached into a pocket to bring out the folded check and place it in George's suddenly clammy hand. But it was a hand that trembled now in excitement and not frustrated but undying hope, *and it was a Kent fifteen years younger!*

One thousand pounds, and at last George knew that he had indeed earned it!

Kent turned and threw open the gates, racing up the drive like a wild man. In the house, lights were starting to go on. George fingered the check unbelievingly and ran his tongue over dry lips. His mind seemed to have frozen over, so that only one phrase kept repeating in his brain. It was something Kent had said: "If you can't find the road back to —"

He gunned the motor, spinning the car wildly round in a spray of gravel. Up on the hill at the top of the drive, Kent was vaulting the fence, and a figure in white was waiting in the garden for him, open arms held wide. George tore his eyes away from them and roared down the hill, as for the second time that night, he headed for the Meadington road.

The check lay on the empty passenger seat now where he'd

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dropped it, and money was quite the last thing in George's mind as he drove his car in an unreasoning panic, leaping the low hills like some demon hurdler as he tried to make it back to the main road before — before what? A hideous doubt was blossoming in his mind, growing like some evil genie from a bottle and taking on a horrible form. All those stories about queer dislocations of space and time — the signpost for Middle Hamborough that was, then wasn't, then was again — and, of course, Kent's story, and his ... rejuvenation?

"I will be very glad," George told himself out loud, "when I reach that junction just outside of Meadington!" For one thing, he could have sworn that it wasn't this much of a drive. He should surely have been there by now. Ah, yes, this would be it coming up now, just around this slight bend ....

No junction!

The road stretched straight on ahead, narrow and suddenly ominous in the sweeping beam of his lights. All right, so the junction was a little further than he'd reckoned. George put his foot down even harder to send the big car racing along the narrow road. The miles flew by without a single signpost or junction, and a ground mist came in that forced George to slow down. He would have done so anyway, for now the road seemed to be exerting a strange pull on his car. The big motor felt as if it were slowing down! George's heart almost leapt into his mouth. There couldn't be anything wrong with the car, could there?

Braking to a halt and switching off the car's engine and lights, George climbed out of the driver's seat. He breathed the damp night air. On unpleasantly rubbery legs he walked round to the front of the car and lifted the hood. An inspection light came on and he cast a quick, practiced glance over the motor. No, he'd worked in a garage for many years and he knew a good motor when he saw one. Nothing wrong with the car, so —

As he straightened up, George felt an unaccustomed suction on his shoes and glanced down at the road. The surface was rubbery, formed of a sort of tough sponge. A worried frown crossed George's face as he bent to feel that peculiar surface. He'd never seen a road surfaced with stuff like that before!

It was as he straightened up again that he heard the tinkling, like the sound of tiny bells from somewhere off the road. Yes, there set back from the road, he could see a row of low squat houses, like great mushrooms partly obscured by the mist that swirled now in strange currents. The tinkling came from the houses.

The outskirts of a village?

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George wondered. Well, at least he'd be able to get directions. He stepped off the road onto turf and made for the houses, only slowing down when he saw how featureless and alike they all looked. The queer tinkling went on, sounding like the gentle noises the hangings on a Christmas tree make in a draft. Other than that there was only the billowing mist and the darkness.

Reaching the first house, stepping very slowly now, George came up close to the wall and stared at it. It was grey, featureless. All the houses looked alike. They were indeed like enormous mushrooms. No windows. Overhanging roofs. Flaps of sorts that could be doors, or there again —

The tinkling had stopped. Very carefully George reached out and touched the wall in front of him. It felt warm ... and it crept beneath his fingers!

Deliberately and slowly George turned about and forced one foot out in front of the other. He fought the urge to look back over his shoulder until, halfway to the mist-wreathed car, he heard an odd plopping sound behind him. It was like the *ploop* you get throwing a handful of mud into a pond. He froze with his back still to the houses.

Quite suddenly he felt sure that his ears were enlarging, stretching back and up to form saucerlike receivers on top of his head. Everything he had went into those ears, and all of it was trying to tune in on what was going on behind him. He didn't turn, but simply stood still; and again there was only the utter silence, loud in his strangely sensitized ears. He forced his dead feet to take a few more paces forward — and sure enough the sound came again, repeating this time: *ploop, ploop, ploop!*

George slowly pivoted on his heel as muscles he never knew he had begun to jump in his face. The noises, each *ploop* sounding closer than the last, stopped immediately. His legs felt like twin columns of jelly, but he somehow completed his turn. He stumbled spastically then, arms flailing to keep himself from falling. The nearest house, or cottage, or whatever, *was right there behind him, within arm's reach!*

Suddenly George's heart, which he was sure had stopped forever, became audible again inside him, banging away in his chest like a trip hammer. All in one movement he turned and bounded for the car, wondering why with each leap he should stay so long in the air, knowing that in fact his body was moving like greased lightning while his mind (in an even greater hurry, one his body couldn't even attempt to match) thought he was in reverse!

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Not bothering, not *daring* to look back again, he almost wrenched the car door from its hinges as he threw himself into the driving seat. Then, in an instant that lasted several centuries, his hand was on the ignition key and the engine was roaring. As he spun the car about in a squeal of tortured tires and accelerated up the rubbery road, he looked in his rearview mirror — and immediately wished he hadn't!

The "houses" were all *plooping* down the road after him — like great greedy frogs — and their "doors" were wide open!

George nearly went off the road then, wrenching at the wheel with clammy hands as he fought to control his careening car on the peculiar surface. A million monstrous thoughts raced through his head as he climbed up through the gears. For of course he knew now for certain that he was trapped in an alien dimension, that the space-time elastic had snapped back into place behind him, stranding him here. Wherever "here" was!

It was only several miles later that he thought to slow down, and only then after passing a junction on the right and a signpost saying: Middle Hamborough 5½ Miles. His heart gave a wild leap as he skidded to a halt on a once-more perfectly normal Tarmac road. Why, that sign meant that just half a mile up the road in front he'd find Meadington, and beyond Meadington ... Bankhead and the M1!

Except that Meadington wasn't there .... Instead, the mist came up again and, worse, the road went rubbery. And no sign of Meadington. When he saw a row of mushroom "houses" standing back from the road, George did an immediate, violent about turn, rocking the car dangerously on the rubber road. Trouble with this weird surface was that it gave too much damn traction.

Amazing that he could still think such mundane thoughts in a situation like this. And yet, through all this protracted nightmare, a ray of hope still shone. The road to Middle Hamborough!

Back there, down that road, there was a house on a hill and beyond that a real, if slightly different, world. A world where at least two of the inhabitants owed him a break. From what Kent had told him, it seemed to George that the other world wasn't much different from his own. He could make a go of things there. He gunned his motor back down the road and out of the mist, back onto a decent Tarmac surface and into normally dark night, turning left at the leaning signpost onto the now familiar road to Middle Hamborough.

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Or was it familiar?

The hedges bordering the road were different somehow, taller, hiding the fields beyond them from the car's probing headlights, and the road seemed narrower than George remembered it. But that must be his imagination acting up after the terrific shocks of the last ten minutes; it *had* to be, for this was the road to Middle Hamborough. Then, cresting the next hill, suddenly George felt that hellish drag of his tires, and his headlights began to do battle with a thickening, swirling mist. At the same time he saw the house atop the next hill, the house set back off the road at the head of a long winding drive. High House!

There were no lights on in the place now, but it was George's refuge nonetheless. Hadn't Kent told him to come back here if he couldn't find his way back to Meadington? George gave a whoop of relief as he swept down into the shallow valley and up the hill towards the wrought-iron roadside gates. They were still open, as Kent had left them; and as he slowed down fractionally, George swung the wheel to the left, turning his car in through the gates. They weren't quite open all the way, though, so that the front of the car slammed them back on their hinges.

Up the drive the front lights of the house instantly came on; two of them that glowed yellow as though shutters had been quickly opened — or lids lifted! George had no time to note anything else — except perhaps that the drive was very white, not the white of gravel but more of leprous flesh — for at that point the car simply stopped as if it had run head-on into a brick wall! George wasn't belted in. He rose up over the steering wheel and crashed through the windshield, automatically turning his shoulder to the glass.

He hit the drive in a shower of glass fragments, screaming and expecting the impact to hurt. It didn't, and then George knew why the car had stopped like that: the drive was as soft and sticky as hot toffee! And it wasn't a drive!

Behind George the wide fleshy ribbon *tasted* the car and, rising up, flicked it easily to one side. Then it tasted George. He had time to scream, barely, and time for one more quite mundane thought — that this wasn't where Kent lived — before that great white chameleon tongue slithered him up the hill to the house, whose entire front below the yellow windows opened up to receive him.

Shortly thereafter the lights went slowly out again, as if someone had lowered shutters, or as if lids had fallen ....

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In which Mr. Cogswell takes on an ancient idea and makes it seem at least as fresh as a Summer rain, and maybe then some.

Grandfather Clause

by THEODORE R. COGSWELL

"Sorry I'm late," Carl said as he limped into Dr. Ackerman's office. "Stopped by to see Mother on the way over and I couldn't get away. She was feeling more than usually mortal. Actually, all she's suffering from is a monumental hangover; but every time she gets on the tail end of one of those four-day binges, she insists she isn't long for this world and lays some more family heirlooms on me. This time I got some of her father's stuff." He tossed a small package on the doctor's desk. "Present for you from Grandfather Petrovich."

"Baby shoes?"

"Beats me. Open it and see."

Ackerman undid the package and took out a small tissue paper-wrapped object and an envelope. Opening the latter, he took out a yellowed newspaper clipping, scanned it, and then looked up Carl quizzically.

"You don't look much like him."

"Who?"

"Your grandfather."

"Let's see." Carl took the clipping, examined the photograph at its top, and nodded. "I sure don't. Anyway," he said, absently pocketing the clipping, "I couldn't get away from Mother's until after three and —"

"Three!" Ackerman let out an outraged squawk. "It's after six now! Where the hell have you been? For somebody who couldn't wait to find out how much time he had left, you sure took your time getting here."

Carl grinned like a tired Cheshire cat. "Met this chick on the bus, see. Had to see if I still had my old touch. So between 78th and 52nd I talked her into stopping into her place for a bracer. Left her my Viet Nam Zippo as a souvenir of."

"You horny son of a bitch," said the doctor in an exasperated

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voice. "Three months away from a wheelchair, and you still have to try and climb everything that moves."

"Only if it's female . . . and human. Never went in for that kinky stuff myself."

The doctor grinned in spite of his annoyance, but then his face sobered as he picked up a folder from his desk.

"Better have a seat," he said. "Lab reports are back and the news isn't good."

Carl seemed strangely unaffected. "Diagnosis confirmed?"

The other nodded gravely. "These hereditary diseases are bastards. Better have your fun while you can because six months from now your central nervous system will have deteriorated to the point where it's going to take an iron lung just to keep you breathing."

Carl shook his head slowly, a strange smile on his face. "Not this baby. You can mark my case *closed* and chuck that folder into the wastebasket. I'm not only cured, I never had *myasthenia agitans.*"

"That's interesting," said the other. "Then why are you limping?"

"Takes a while for the muscle tone to come back. Check me out and you'll find I have the reflexes of a healthy, thirty-four-year-old stud."

Dr. Ackerman leaned back in his chair, lit a cigarette, and blew a jet of smoke in Carl's direction. "All right," he said wearily, "what's the gag? Been to Lourdes for a miraculous healing since I saw you last?"

Carl was obviously enjoying himself. "Never left the city. My trip was in a different direction. You told me my disease was hereditary, and so I decided to get rid of pappy's genes. Nailed him on the way to his own wedding reception."

"Painlessly, I trust?"

"I didn't hurt him," Carl said. "I just put him on the bus for L.A. and told him that if he came back in less than six weeks, I'd personally rip off his head and jam it so high he'd suffer from chronic constipation the rest of his life. Dad died when I was quite young, but I remember him as always being a timid little fellow. I can guarantee that he didn't dare stick his nose back in town until the end of April. And since I was born in November with all my fingernails, that lets me off the genetic hook."

"Immaculate conception?"

"Who cares? I'm here."

"I know you get tired of having everybody ask you the same question, but did you walk back to 1938 or take a cab?"

Carl chuckled, reached in his jacket pocket, and pulled out a flat,

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shiny gadget the size of a small transistor radio. "Used my little handy-dandy time hopper. You may be the best geneticist in the business, but I happen to be the best man in temporal physics. I've been playing around with the idea for this for some time. But when you lowered the boom with your diagnosis, I went to work on the design in dead earnest. Completed it just in time, too."

"Climb off it, Carl," Ackerman said sharply. "This is no time for fooling around."

"A doubting Ackerman, eh? Do you lock the desk drawer at night?"

"No. Why?"

"Give me ten seconds and you'll see." Carl took a piece of paper from the desk, scrawled something on it, and showed it to the doctor. Then he adjusted a dial on the small, flat box. Holding the paper in one hand, he pushed a button on the box with the other and flicked out of sight. A second later he was back.

"Did I see what I thought I just saw?" The doctor's face was white and he was crouched back in his chair.

"You sure did. Now check your desk drawer. I hopped back to early this morning."

The other slowly pulled open the desk drawer, took out a piece of paper with shaking fingers, and read aloud, "I was here. Where were you? Carl."

He gave a soft whistle. "It really works!"

"It really does."

The doctor eyed Carl somberly for a moment and then, taking a rubber mallet out of a cabinet, went over and rapped his kneecap sharply. The foot barely moved.

"Just as I expected," he said. "You may be the best in your field, but you're sure an ignoramous when it comes to mine. All you did was turn yourself from a figurative bastard to a literal one. The recessive that produces *myasthenia agitans* is a sex-linked gene. It had to come through your mother. As far as the disease goes, who your father was is immaterial. The male Y chromosome can't carry it."

For a moment Carl lost his usual exuberance, but then with an obvious effort he bounced back.

"Well, at least the trip wasn't a complete waste. I met a really luscious redhead." He hesitated for a minute. "But if pappy wasn't the villain, who was?"

"One of your mother's parents. I'm checking on both and I should have the results in before too long. Drop back next week. Tuesday at four?"

"Wilco."

Ackerman looked at the tissue paper-wrapped object on his desk. "Hey, you forgot something."

"Keep it. Who wants baby shoes?" said Carl over his shoulder

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as he limped out the door.

Ackerman unwrapped the package, looked at its contents for a moment, and then rewrapped it and put it in his desk drawer.

"What happened?" said Dr. Ackerman, glancing at his watch. "You not only made it back on Tuesday, you made it on time."

"Just curious," said Carl. "The results on my grandparents come in yet?"

"Just your grandmother's side. I had a three-generation check made and that line's clean as a hound's tooth. Most of the natural deaths took place after eighty. Even those who were hung, electrocuted, or shot in barroom brawls had all made it into their forties. I never heard of a *myasthenia agitans* case yet who wasn't dead by his middle thirties."

"Thanks," said Carl wryly.

"I haven't the results on your grandfather's line yet. He was born in Russia, and getting hold of the necessary vital statistics isn't going to be easy."

"Why bother?"

"It's standard practice. Once the genetic transmission line is worked out, we can at least warn other descendants of the chance they are taking if they have children. Fortunately I met a Russian geneticist in London last year who shared my enthusiasm for blondes and Scotch. I cabled him and he's running interference for me. The results should be through before too long."

"I still don't see why my choice of fathers doesn't make any difference but my choice of grandfathers does," said Carl.

"If you physicists took more interest in the biological sciences, you wouldn't ask such silly questions. There's a generation skip in sex-linked chromosome hereditary diseases. When a male carrying the gene links with a female who doesn't, his sons come out clean, but his daughters are carriers. The males of the next generation have a fifty-fifty chance of inheriting. You lost the toss. Unfortunately your grandfather died in his early twenties immediately after your mother was conceived. Since *myasthenia agitans* is a disease of the thirties, there was no advance warning as far as you were concerned."

There was a long moment of silence, and then Carl said grimly, "Looks like I'm going to have to go back and take care of grandpappy too."

"Now hold it!" protested Ackerman. "I don't care how you twist the paradoxes involved, you still can't go back and kill your own grandfather, because if you do, you'll never be born to go back and do it — or something like that," he

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concluded lamely.

"Better not to be born at all than to be the way I'm going to be in a few months. Look, friend, I've appreciated your leveling with me, but your description of what I can expect in the short time I have left hasn't been exactly calculated to encourage a stoic acceptance. I've been doing a bit of investigating on my own." He pulled out a faded clipping which pictured a young soldier in World War I uniform.

"Remember this? It was in the package Mother gave me that I gave you. From what I can calculate from the difference between mother's birth date and the date grandfather's troopship pulled into New York, conception had to take place almost immediately after his arrival. A week after he landed, his body was found floating in the East River, and he'd been dead for some days then. All that I intend to do is move the inevitable up a day or two." He rose to his feet with a certain amount of difficulty. "See you in a few days. This one's going to take a bit of preparation."

1919. It was unseasonably warm for early May, and Carl felt half-choked by the high neck of the heavy wool WW I Air Corps officer's tunic he'd picked up at the costume rental shop. He leaned against a pillar beside the gangplank leading down from the rusty troopship, the old clipping containing his grandfather's picture in one hand and a Fatima cigarette in the other. The heavy, sweet smoke was gagging him, but his usual filter-tip 100's would have been too conspicuous in his new time slot. At last a sailor came down the gangplank, a bulging sea bag slung over each shoulder.

"Hey," Carl called. "When's Aero Squadron 139 due to disembark? I've got a relative on board."

The sailor dropped his bags at the sight of the captain's bars and snapped a quick salute. "Won't be until way after midnight, sir. They can't be cleared from quarantine until the port doctor gets here. He's still got two ships to go before he can check out this one."

Carl nodded his thanks and pulled out his thick pocket Ingersoll. At least three hours. He stuffed the watch back in his pocket and wandered off to find a friendly bar and a long drink.

Pat's Place was less crowded with uniforms than the other places he'd checked. He understood why when, after fifteen minutes, he still hadn't been able to get a drink.

"Hey, love," he called to the cute but harried barmaid, "how about working down this way? I'm dying of thirst."

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She flashed a look at his carefully selected service ribbons — in a moment of generosity he'd awarded himself the Congressional Medal of Honor — and then gave him a weary smile. "Sorry, Captain, but Pat and the regular bartender are out with the flu and I've been trying to run this whole place by myself. Why don't you try next door? I'm going to be closing down in fifteen minutes anyway. My old man's ship pulled in this afternoon and he's due to disembark around ten."

"What's he on?"

"The *John Francis.* And I hope he's in a better mood when he gets off than he was in when he left. Beats me why I ever married that mean son of a bitch. Why do you ask?"

"I just came from the pier. They're hung up in quarantine. It'll be at least two A.M. before they get turned loose. But why don't you shut down anyway so the two of us can have a quiet drink. If he's as mean as you say he is, you need to get braced up for that reunion."

"Hey," yelled Carl to a hulking young corporal. "Your name Petrovsky? Peter Petrovsky?"

"What's it to you?"

The clipping didn't do him justice. The blurred, course-screen print hadn't revealed the extent to which his chin actually receded or the pustular blackheads which gave testimony to a lifelong aversion to soap and water.

"I'd like to talk to you."

"Why? My shoes ain't shiny enough for you? Pocket flap ain't buttoned?" Petrovsky's little pig eyes screwed up malevolently. "Screw! Two years now little snots like you been giving me the shaft. But no more. You can take them bars and stuff them. War's over, and I don't have to take no more crap from no more college punks nowhow."

Clearing his throat, he spat a gob of slimy phlegm in the general direction of Carl's shiny boots.

"You figuring on dishing out some more? Like maybe calling the M.P.'s 'cause I didn't give your tin bars a proper salute?"

Carl gazed in dismay at the loutish figure that was advancing toward him. Nervously he backed into a narrow alleyway formed by two high rows of crates.

"Now, look," he said in a placating voice, "I don't mind your not saluting. In a few weeks we'll all be civilians again. It's just that —"

"And then the likes of you will be sitting up in the front office lording it over the likes of me," snarled the corporal. "Fire me for spending too much time in the can, will you?"

With a growl of maniacal rage, he whipped a trench knife out of his

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boot and lunged toward Carl, the point held low for a ripping thrust. At the sight of death hurtling toward him, Carl's old combat reflexes took over, slowed somewhat by the disease that was slowly robbing his axones of their protective myelin coating, but still adequate. One hand lept out, grabbed the wrist of the arm bearing the knife; and then with a quick, easy motion, he ducked and sent the corporal hurtling over his shoulder. A split second later there was the thud of a heavy body slamming into unyielding metal, and then a despairing scream. He spun around just in time to see a pair of dirty GI boots disappear through the narrow gap between the pier and the rusty side of the *John Francis.* A splash was followed by silence.

"Grandfather," murmured Carl contritely, "I didn't mean for it to end this way."

"Freeze!"

Carl turned and blinked at the M.P. sergeant who had appeared out of nowhere and stood, legs straddled, one hand resting casually on the butt of a holstered forty-five.

"Unprovoked assault on an enlisted man," the NCO said with obvious satisfaction. "Couldn't wait to get back in that front office so you could get back to firing the likes of us for spending too much time in the can, could you? Well, Captain, when the general court-martial hears my testimony —"

"They won't believe it," said Carl as he reached in his pocket and pushed the button that would flip him back to the present.

"O.K., thorn in the side of the AMA," proclaimed Carl as he bounced into Ackerman's office, "give me the hammer whack which will pronounce me a free man."

The doctor looked up from some papers he had been studying. "You know," he said, "I've always known you were a number of unusual things, but there was one I never suspected you of being."

"A medical anomaly. Thanks to you, the Ackerman syndrome is about to find a place in medical history. The statistics on your grandfather's family just came through from Russia. No *myasthenia agitans* in that line either." Picking up his rubber mallet, he walked over and tapped Carl briskly on the knee. This time the leg didn't quiver. "For the first time in the history of medical science an obvious case of *myasthenia agitans* has surfaced in which the recessive gene can't be traced farther back than the mother."

"Then it wasn't Petrovsky," Carl muttered.

"What?"

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"I went back."

"And?"

"You might say he committed suicide. I didn't actually plan on killing him. I just intended to get him out of the way long enough to keep grandmother from being impregnated by him. It wasn't my fault he ended up dead. Or at least my intent," he added sadly. Then he gave a wan smile. "But at least one thing didn't change with time."

"No again?"

Carl gave a happy nod.

"And what did she get?"

"A gold-plated pocket Ingersoll complete with engraved pilot's wings."

"Oh, shit!"

"What's the matter?"

"There went Ackerman's syndrome." He reached in his desk drawer and pulled out a small tissue paper-wrapped object.

"What's that?"

"A family heirloom. You left it here the day you came from your mother's. I unwrapped it after you left, but I didn't pay any attention to it until you pushed the magic button just now. Here."

Carl removed the tissue paper wrapping. In his hand lay a gold-plated pocket Ingersoll complete with engraved pilot's wings. He stared at it blankly for a minute.

"Then that means ...."

Ackerman nodded slowly. "I can't believe it either, but somehow you've managed to end up being your own grandfather. Which makes your mother your daughter. And I'd rather not think any more about any of this."

Carl looked dazed. "Then I inherited the disease from myself!"

"Right. If you hadn't started your silly time hopping, you'd be healthy as a horse right now. Petrovsky was clean."

There was a long moment of silence, and then Carl pulled a small, flat, shiny gadget out of his pocket.

"A little tinkering with the circuitry...." His voice trailed off.

Ackerman looked at him blankly for a moment. Then his face lit up with a look of sudden comprehension.

"The future! Of course! If you move far enough ahead, you'll be able to find a cure for anything. Even *myasthenia agitans.*"

"If I'm lucky," said Carl. "But just in case they haven't found the answer up there, will you do me a favor?"

"What's that?"

"See if you can get hold of an iron lung built for two."

As Carl picked up his grandfather's watch and went out the door, Ackerman waved an affectionate farewell.

"Just for you, old buddy," he murmured. "But somehow I don't think it will be necessary."

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From long-time contributor Randall Garrett, an Irish fantasy, that is to say a story full of action and color, about Fion Mac Cumhaill, who died and went to something resembling Hell.

The Final Fighting of Fion Mac Cumhaill

by RANDALL GARRETT

Fion Mac Cumhaill, was, as everyone knows, the strongest man of his time in Ireland, and perhaps the strongest ever. It has been said of him that he could grasp himself by his ear and hold himself at arm's length, so strong was he, but this, of course, is all foolishness. What he *could* do is thrust his great spear into the ground, grasp its stout shaft with either mighty hand, lift his feet from the ground, and *then* hold himself at arm's length, parallel to the ground, like a banner in the breeze.

And if, after a time, he grew a bit weary in that arm, he would simply change hands without ever touching the ground and go on as before.

Himself was strong indeed, but, after all, he couldn't do the impossible.

Now Fion Mac Cumhaill was the leader of the Fian during the time when Cormac Mac Airt was the High King at Tara, before the coming of the Blessed Padraic. His father and his grandfather before him had been leaders of the Fian, and his father, Cumhaill, had brought the Finan almost to the peak of perfection by the time Fion Mac Cumhaill took over, and himself perfected it even more.

The Fian was, you might say, both the Army and the Constabulary of Ireland, the mightiest weapon of the High King at Tara. In time of peace, the Fianna — the men of the Fian — kept the peace. In time of war, when threatened by Roman fleets, or by pirates, or — for all I know — Vikings, the Fianna rallied round their leader and fought them off. (They were never threatened by the Britons at this time, since the Britons had not yet become English.)

Their job was to obey the orders of the High King, to uphold justice and put down injustice and to

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guard Ireland from foreign invaders, and this job they did well.

Now, it is not my intention to repeat all the great tales of Fion Mac Cumhaill, for these have been told innumerable times by innumerable seanachies, the storytellers of Ireland, and, besides, they can all be found in the *Agallam na Seanorach*, the tales told by the poet and bard Oisin, son of Fion Mac Cumhaill, and written down by Breogan, the personal scribe to Blessed Padraic. Those stories I am not going to tell.

(You may ask how it is that Oisin could tell these tales to Blessed Padraic after nearly three hundred years had passed since the death of Fion Mac Cumhaill, but that is a part of the story I am going to tell. So be good enough to wait.)

Now, the death of Fion Mac Cumhaill has been widely told by the historians of Ireland, and I'll not recount what happened before or during the Battle of Gavra, for that, too, is common knowledge. But what happened afterwards to Fion Mac Cumhaill is known only to a few, and since I am one of them, I shall tell it now.

Fion Mac Cumhaill woke up.

The last he remembered, he had been thrust through by many and many a spearhead.

"Now," said Fion Mac Cumhaill to himself, "by all rights, I should be dead. But indeed I am not. Or am I?"

He sat himself up and looked around.

There was, he had to admit, very little to see. There was a heavy fog all about, and a wan light everywhere like that of a winter's morning just before the rising of the sun. All round him was nothing but sand. No big rocks, no small stones, not even a pebble. Nothing but level, dry sand as grey as the fog itself. Beyond ten paces, there was nothing to be seen, for the fog covered it all. There was no breeze, and, for all that Fion Mac Cumhaill had the sharpest hearing in all Ireland, not a sound could he hear.

"Halloo!" he shouted.

Now, it has been said that when Fion Mac Cumhaill shouted in Munster he could be heard in Ulster, but here the fog swallowed up his voice as though it had been a whisper.

He stood to his feet, and his hands began brushing the clinging grains of sand from his body. Then he looked down and stared at himself in astonishment. There was not a thread of clothing on him. Gone was his battle shirt of many-layered waxed linen; gone was his tunic of fine-meshed ring-mail; gone was his belt with the golden clasp. Gone was everything, in fact, even his fine silk undershirt.

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"Well, now," said he, "here is a fine thing indeed. Where is my sword? Where is my spear?" He looked all round him again. "Where is my shield with its green leather cover? And my war cap of gilded bronze?" His bright eyes narrowed in anger. "All stolen. The work of the men of Clan Morna, I will be wagering; stripped my body like the barbarians they are."

He brushed more grey sand off his mighty chest. Then he stopped and looked more carefully at himself.

"Now just one small minute," said he. "The last I remember, the five sons of Urgriu were round me in a circle. And I remember getting slashed with spearheads *here* and *here* and *here* and *here*."

He jabbed himself with a thick, strong forefinger in each place. "And then the eldest got past my guard and my shield and —" He winced. "Right through the heart. I remember it, and the pain of it. But —" He looked again. "There is no sign of it anywhere at all. And that is a peculiar thing indeed."

He put his thumb between his teeth and bit lightly at the end of it, thinking deeply. (His thumb, you must understand, he had scorched when but a lad, when he had been cooking Fintan, the Salmon of Knowledge, for his master, the Druid Finegas, and the hot oil had made him put his thumb in his mouth to cool it. Since then, when he put that thumb between his teeth, the knowledge he sought would come to him.)

"Well, now," said he. "It seems I am dead indeed. But I do not feel in the least dead. It is cold and hungry and thirsty I feel, but not dead."

He looked round about him again and said to himself: "Now, Fion Mac Cumhaill, there is no use at all in wandering about in this fog. By the looks of the light, the sun will soon be up, or it will soon be dark. There is no way of telling east from west or north from south in this fog. So I might as well wait to see which it is. Without further evidence, there is no point at all in running anywhere and everywhere, like a mad banshee, so you'll sit yourself down, Fion Mac Cumhaill, and wait for more evidence." For himself was a cool and logical reasoner, and it is said that the Doyles are his direct descendants.

So Fion Mac Cumhaill sat himself down again and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

There was no way of knowing how long he waited, for time is measured by change, and there was no change. The fog, the light, and the sand all stayed the same, and besides himself there was nothing else about but the fog, the light, and the sand.

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So at last Fion Mac Cumhaill got himself to his feet, brushed off the sand, and started walking. "At the least," he told himself, "I'll find a place that's warm and has food and drink, which I won't find if I just sit in one place. Besides, I can always find my way back by following my own footprints."

Well, he soon found there was no truth in that idea. The cold grey sand was so dry that by the time he had taken ten or fifteen paces the footprints had drifted in and filled themselves up so that there was no trace of them whatever.

"Ah, well," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "there was nothing there, anyway, so I might as well keep walking." And he did.

How long did he walk? There is no way of knowing.

He grew tired, and would sit down or lie down, but he could never sleep. He was hungry to the point where he could have eaten a whole deer, bones, hide, hair, hooves, horns, and all, but he was never quite starving. He became thirsty enough that he could have drained the entire Irish Sea in a draught, but he was never on the verge of dying of it. And he was chilled to the bone, but never quite froze.

He tried to keep time by counting his steps, but his mind would get all boggled up with the monotony of everything, and he would lose count and have to start all over again. On occasion, when he thought of it, he would shout in his great voice, but there was never an answer nor even an echo.

Until, after a long time, he shouted "Halloo!" — more from force of habit than from expectation — and he thought he heard an echo. A small "halloo," as from a very great distance.

He stopped. Filling his great lungs, he faced the direction from which the echo had seemed to come and shouted a "HALLOO!" that should have been heard from Galway Bay to the shore of Britain.

"'Halloo!" came the echo, less distant this time. But it was really no echo, for it continued on: "There is only one man who ever lived who could shout so loud as all that! Are you indeed my father's father, the one and only Fion MacCumhaill?"

For the first time in this grey and monotonous hinterland, Fion Mac Cumhaill felt joy in his heart. "I am indeed!" he shouted. "And are you truly Osca Mac Oisin, son of my son?"

"I am indeed, Fion Mac Cumhaill!" And from the fog bank less than a dozen paces from Fion Mac Cumhaill stepped Osca Mac Oisin — strong, young, handsome, clean-limbed and clear-eyed, and naked as the day he was born.

We are told that Fion Mac

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Cumhaill cried only twice in his life, and the last was when he saw Osca dying after having killed Cairbri Mac Cormac at the Battle of Gavra, and, in a way, this is true. But he cried a third time when he met Osca again on that cold, endless, foggy grey plain, and this time it was for joy.

Then they sat on the cold grey sand and talked for a long time, and most of what they talked about was their own personal business and none of our own, and so I will not tell it here.

But they did compare their adventures — or, really, *lack* of adventures — since they had wakened in this grey place, and their stories were the same. And since I have already told what happened to Fion Mac Cumhaill, there is no need whatever to tell exactly the same tale about Osca Mac Oisin.

But you must also understand that there had been a coolness between Fion Mac Cumhaill and Osca Mac Oisin for many a year before the Battle of Gavra, for reasons which I shall explain later. And, for some reason, the differences between them had vanished, and they were comrades and friends again.

"Well, then, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said Osca after the long discussion was through, "what shall we do now? We have sat and talked for a long time; shall we walk for a while?"

"You say that as though there were no purpose in it," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

"And so I feel," said Osca. "We will go on forever in this terrible place where all places are the same and nothing ever changes."

Fion Mac Cumhaill frowned and chewed gently at the tip of his thumb. Then, after a time, he said: "Osca, if what you just said were true, that there has been no change, then your conclusion would be correct. There would be no purpose in anything further. But what you just said was *not* true. I do not mean that you lie, but you have not thought it through. There *has* been change."

Osca looked about at the grey, sand-covered, fog-shrouded, dim-lit, unchanging landscape. "I am sorry, Fion Mac Cumhaill," he said at last. "I do not say you lie, but *I* see no change."

"*We have met,*" said Fion Mac Cumhaill firmly.

"We have," agreed Osca Mac Oisin. "And that in itself is a change."

"It is," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "And what do you deduce from that?"

"Why," said Osca, "it is quite plain. If we keep going, we may meet someone else."

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"My thought exactly, my dear," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "So let us be up and on our way."

And so they did.

They walked and they sat, still hungry but not hungrier, thirsty but not thirstier, chilled to the bone but not frozen. And all the time they talked, unburdening themselves to each other, talking man to man and straightening out the differences between them.

And, of course, shouting an occasional "Halloo!"

And, after a long time in the grey wasteland, they heard a reply.

And the man they met was Dearmid O Duivna, still as beautiful and strong as ever he was, and clad as themselves.

When Fion Mac Cumhaill and Dearmid O Duivna saw each other, they both stopped, stood still, and said not a word for a long moment.

Now, you must remember, as I am sure all of you do, that it was through the behavior of Dearmid O Duivna that Osca Mac Oisin and Fion Mac Cumhaill had come to be at odds with each other. For Fion Mac Cumhaill had wanted the hand of Grania, daughter of Cormac Mac Airt, High King at Tara, and Dearmid O Duivna had stolen her quite away and lived with her for many years. Osca had been witness to the fact that Grania had laid an unbreakable geas upon Dearmid O Duivna, and that Dearmid could no more help himself in obeying her every wish than a salmon can help swimming up a river from the sea, and that it was not Dearmid's fault at all, but Fion Mac Cumhaill could never see it that way and had remained Dearmid's enemy until Dearmid's death, in spite of the fact that the highest officers of the Fian had upheld Dearmid O Duivna's innocence.

But now Fion Mac Cumhaill had talked long and long with Osca Mac Oisin. There, naked in the grey fog, he held out hs arms: "Welcome you are, Dearmid O Duivna," said he, "and right glad am I to see you once again. You were once the bravest and strongest of the Fianna, and I am sorry with all my heart for the wrongs I have done you. Will you forgive and forget?"

With no hesitation at all, Dearmid O Duivna came forward and embraced Fion Mac Cumhaill. "With all my heart," said he. "And I hope you can forgive me, Fion Mac Cumhaill, for I have been wandering alone through this terrible foggy desert with nothing to do but think about the foolishness I have done in my life, and I dearly wish your forgiveness for the wrongs I have done against you. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?"

"Indeed I can," said Fion Mac

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Cumhaill, "and indeed I do. Let it all be as nothing between us. Now, will you come with me and with Osca? For we have a theory between us, which we will tell you all about, and we are looking for others of the Fianna in this awful place."

And the three of them set out across the wasteland of the nothing place, looking for another change.

After a long time of walking, putting one foot in front of another, making prints in the dry, cold, grey sand that filled them up afterwards — after a long time, as I say, Dearmid O Duivna said: "You said you had a theory, Fion Mac Cumhaill. Now, I have thought greatly upon this matter, and I, myself, have a notion about all this queer business. But I would hear your theory first, for you are our leader and by far the oldest and wisest of us three, and so I ask you to tell me your thoughts."

"Indeed I will not, my darling," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Osca and I have long talked this over, and we need a fresh viewpoint. So you will speak first."

"Well, then," said Dearmid, "it was my thinking when I first woke up that I had been put here as a punishment for my errors and wrongdoings, and perhaps that is so after all. But since then I have been thinking that I — and yourself — were put here to learn something. That this is a punishment to teach us a lesson, not merely a torture to make us suffer."

After these words, Osca looked at his grandfather, Fion Mac Cumhaill, and himself nodded without a word, and so Osca spoke.

"Dearmid," said he, "you have put it in short, sweet words. That is exactly what my grandfather Fion and myself have been thinking. And one of the things that we have learnt is to forgive and forget old indignities and harms done against us."

"That we have," said Dearmid O Duivna, "but we are still here. What else is there to learn?"

"Dearmid," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "do you remember when you were a lad and were learning the alphabet, the *Beth-Luis-Nion?*"

"That I do," said Dearmid O Duivna.

"Had you any idea then what it would be like to be able to actually *read?* To be able to enjoy the great tales of old without actually hearing them from the lips of a seanachie?"

Dearmid O Duivna thought for a moment. "I did not indeed, Fion Mac Cumhaill," he admitted at last.

"Well, then, we have learnt our *Beth-Luis-Lion,* perhaps. Let us go on and see what more there is to learn."

And so they went on.

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It would be of no profit to anyone for me to tell of the immeasurable time that followed as, by ones and by twos, they found the others of the Fianna. Not all of them, by any means, not even at the end, but most of the best were there.

Tough old one-eyed Goll Mác Morna. Conan Mac Lia, of the stout spear, and Conan Maol, of the hairy back. Keelta Mac Ronan, of the fleet foot, who was a minstrel second only to Oisin Mac Fion. Ligan Lumina, the leaper, who, it was said, could leap clean over the castle at Tara, were he a mind to.

Many and many they found, and, as the ranks of the Fian grew greater, the more were found in what seemed a shorter time. And one of the reasons for this, of course, was that Fion Mac Cumhaill got them singing as they marched. They sang the fine old marching songs of the Fian, some of which were older than the Fian itself and went back to the days of the Red Branch Knights and the time of Cu Chullain, and one beautiful march that was said to have come down from the time of Queen Macha Mong Ruad, half a thousand years before, for in those days, as today, the Irish never forgot a good song, no matter how old it might be.

And, as more voices were added, the louder and more carrying the singing became, to penetrate even farther into the cold, heavy, grey fog that surrounded them, and so call more wanderers to them.

Every so often, at the end of a song, they would stop and form a circle, and, facing outwards, they would all shout "Halloo!" together, three times, and then wait quietly to hear if there was an answer, and when there was, there was great rejoicing.

When they all grew weary, they would stop marching and singing, and sit down to talk and to think.

And their talk was not as it had been in the old days, when they had roamed the hills and valleys, the meadows and forests of green Ireland, telling each other stories of the battle or of the hunt the day before. They did at first, a little, talk about old adventures, but soon all the old stories had been told, and they began talking about how they felt and thought about themselves and about others, about the world and the great universe. They became philosophers, for there was nothing else to do. And when an Irishman *has* to do something — he does it.

Now the last three to join them were Fergus Finvel, the wise old counselor whom Fion Mac Cumhaill had relied on for so many years, and Daring Mac Dobar, who had the gift of being able to shut his

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eyes and, looking into the darkness at the back of his head, see what was going on anywhere in the world, and, last of all, Duanach Mac Morna, the Druid, who was wise and knowledgeable in ways that were hidden to the ordinary man. These three, Fergus, Daring, and Duanach, had met early on and wandered much together, and talked and thought together, and had come to the same theory that Fion Mac Cumhaill, Osca Mac Oisin, and Dearmid O Duivin had arrived at, although, being philosophers to begin with, they had thought deeper.

And these three were the last of all.

But, not knowing this, the men of the Fian went on.

Some long unmeasurable time after this, when they had stopped to shout "Halloo!" they heard an answering shout. They shouted again and got another answer.

"If I had anything to wager, which indeed I do not," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "I would wager that the voices we hear come from a large group of men. As large, perhaps, as ourselves."

Goll Mac Morna tried to peer through the fog with his single bright eye. "Are you thinking they might be enemies?" said he.

"I am not," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "but we shall see." He shouted: *"Who might you be?"* It was a medium shout, not a great one, meant to carry no farther than from Dublin to Ailenn.

Fion Mac Cumhaill looked at wise old Fergus Finvel and said: "I am thinking I have heard that voice before, Fergus Finvel," said he.

"Indeed you have, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said the wise counselor, "for it is your own."

"So I was thinking. An echo it is. Well, now, here is another change — a change of a different kind. Let us go on, my brave darlings, and see what it is that makes an echo in this flat and featureless wasteland."

And so they did, and after less than a thousand paces they came to a great wall, solid and massy — and grey, like the sand grains of the desert.

One of the Fianna said: "A wall it is. Now, what would a wall be doing here?"

"It has been my experience," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "that a wall has only two reasons for being: to keep things in or to keep them out. Let us discover which sort of wall this is." And he called for Ligan the Leaper.

"Ligan Lumina," said himself, "can you jump as well as ever?"

"I am thinking that I can, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said Ligan.

"Then jump straight up and see if you can touch the top of this wall."

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"That I will," said Ligan. He crouched down and gave a mighty leap and disappeared into the grey fog overhead. The men of the Fian watched until he came down with a mighty thump and a spray of sand. Without a word, Ligan the Leaper shook his head, crouched again and fired himself up into the grey fog. He came down and tried a third time.

And this time when he came down, he brushed the sand off himself and said: "Fion Mac Cumhaill, there is no top to this wall that I can find."

Fion Mac Cumhaill nodded and said: "If Ligan Lumina cannot reach the top of a wall, then it is higher by far than any wall in Ireland. Now there are only three ways to get on the other side of a wall: over it, around it, or through it. We cannot go over it, and I see no way to go through it, and so we must go around. Now, shall we go to the left or to the right?"

Duanach Mac Morna the Druid, brother to Goll Mac Morna, stepped forward. "Fion Mac Cumhaill, I still have my learning and my knowledge. Let me determine which way we should go."

"There is no one else could do it," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

So Duanach Mac Morna bent over and took in his big hands a great scoop of the cold grey sand, and, holding it, closed his eyes for a moment.

Then he bent over and let the dry grey sand pour from between his hands to make a heap, and before the heap could drift down flat again, he came down on it hard with the sole of his right foot, splattering it all about. His quick eyes took in the pattern that was made before it vanished; then he said: "We go to the left."

"To the left it is," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

And off they went.

Now all the time they walked, Fion Mac Cumhaill wondered to himself whether or not the wall was really a wall or just a high cliff, for it was impossible to tell by looking at it whether it was a wall built by human hands or simply a natural thing. Then he realized that, since the Fianna were the only human beings he had yet seen, and since nothing about this place seemed natural anyway, there was no way of deciding, and so he decided to postpone his thoughts until there was more evidence.

And that was when they came to the doorway.

It was not a big doorway, being wide enough only to allow three men at a time to walk through, and the lintel was low enough that Fion Mac Cumhaill could touch it with his upraised arm reaching high to feel it with his fingertips.

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The door was set into the wall — or cliff — and was closed by a door that seemed to be made of good Irish oak, except that it was a pale and rather dirty grey.

"Well, now, my dears," said himself, "what do we make of this?"

Osca Mac Oisin went over to the oakish door and put his palms against it, looking at the door all over. "Do you notice, Grandfather Fion," said he, "do you see that the fog is somewhat thinner about this doorway?"

"That I have," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Why should that be?"

"Because the door is warm," said Osca.

At hearing these words, many of the Fianna came forward, for it had been a long time since any of them had felt anything but the chill of the grey desert that had gnawed into their bones.

"Hold back!" said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "There may be something here we'd not like!" Then he said to Daring Mac Dobar: "Come forward, Daring Mac Dobar. Look into the dark in the back of your mind and tell us what is beyond this door."

Daring came foward, but he said: "No good will it do, Fion Mac Cumhaill. I can see anything in the world, anything on earth, but I cannot see in this place, and it is sorry I am to have to say that."

"That I can understand," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Duanach Mac Morna, can your counsel help us?"

The Druid stepped forward and said: "Perhaps, perhaps not. Have you noticed what is inscribed over the doorway?"

"I have," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "but the characters are not Ogham, nor Latin, nor Runic, nor Greek, and so I cannot make them out at all, for they are like nothing I have ever seen before."

"Nor have I seen their like before," said Duanach the Druid. "But there is something which has been put in my mind that makes them clear, and what they say is this: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.'"

"Do they now?" said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Well, I have hope that I can get my men warmed and get some meat and drink into them, and that hope I shall not abandon." And with that he walked up to the door and pounded upon it in a way that made it shake.

And a voice came from within, a great, hollow, booming voice that sounded as if it were echoing from endless caverns: *'Who might that be without?'*

"I am Fion Mac Cumhaill!" said himself in a loud voice. "I come with my men of the Fian to ask your hospitality, for we have been without food and drink for

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long and long a time!"

The voice from within boomed out: *"Fion Mac Cumhaill! Come in and be welcome! We have been expecting you and your men!"*

And the door swung wide and the Fianna were dazzled, for there was light and color within which shocked the eyes of men who had for so long seen nothing but dull grey, and a burst of warm air that took the chill, which they had long become used to, from their skins.

Without further invitation, in they went.

Now has come the time to tell, very briefly, the story of what happened to Oisin, the son of Fion and the father of Osca.

Now, first you must understand that Oisin was the son of Fion Mac Cumhaill by the beautiful Saba, a maiden of the Tuatha de Danaan, a race of great power and ability in Ireland. And you must understand that the blood of the Tuatha de Danaan ran strong in the veins of Oisin Mac Fion, and so it should not be surprising that he fell hopelessly in love the first time he saw Niamh of the Golden Hair, for she was a Princess of the Danaan, and her father was the King of Tyr-na-nOg, the Land of the Ever-Young, far out in the Western Sea. And, considering Oisin's beauty and abilities, there can be no wonder that the Princess Niamh was equally in love with him. Not even the fatherly pleadings of Fion Mac Cumhaill could keep Oisin from riding away with her on a magical white horse that could gallop across the Western Sea to Tyr-na-nOg, where the King gave much land and great riches to his new son-in-law.

But after three years in the Land of the Ever-Young, Oisin became restless to go back to green Ireland — just for a short visit, mind you — to see again that lovely land and to speak again with his father and his son and the men of the Fian.

"Very well, if you must, Oisin my love," said Niamh of the Golden Hair, "but I lay this geas upon you: that you shall never allow your feet to touch the soil of Ireland, for if you do, you shall never return to me, and I fear in my heart that I shall never see you again."

"If that is the binding, then so shall it be," said Oisin Mac Fion, and off he went, on the back of the magical white horse, to the shores of Ireland, and headed straight for Fion Mac Cumhaill's castle at Almu, in Kildare.

But when he got there, he was sore puzzled, for the high hill of Almu was there, but it was all grown over with shrubs and grass, and there was no sign of the home of Fion Mac Cumhaill. Pondering

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this, he came upon a group of rather smallish men who were trying to move a great stone, and he thought to himself that if he helped these people with their work, they might answer a question or two. A dozen of the smallish men had not been able to budge the stone, but Oisin Mac Fion leaned out from his saddle and with one hand tossed the stone to where the smallish men wanted it.

It was no strain on Oisin at all, but the strain of lifting so great a weight was too much for the saddle girth, for it split beneath the belly of the magical white horse, and Oisin Mac Fion went tumbling to the ground. Immediately, the white horse bounded away with a gallop as fleet as the wind, headed toward the Western Sea, and was seen no more in Ireland.

The smallish men, their mouths agape, went over to the fallen hero. And they continued to stare.

"Faith," said one of them finally, "I could have sworn by the saints that he was young and handsome. But he is old — old."

"That he is," said another. "Very old. But how could so old a man have moved a great stone that a dozen of us could not budge a finger's breadth?"

"That is beyond our judgment," said a third. "We must take the poor man to Pirest Padraic, for only himself has the wisdom and the power to solve this riddle."

And so it was that, some time later, Oisin Mac Fion was telling his tale to Priest Padraic at Drum Derg, where the blessed bishop was living at the time.

"And so," Oisin finished his tale in a quavering, weak, old voice, "when I returned after only three years, all was changed. The Dun of Almu is gone; the people are all smallish and weak. And I am old and even weaker. What has happened?"

"My son," said the Blessed Padraic, in a soft, kindly, sad voice, "I must tell you that it has been, not *three* years, but upwards of *three hundred* years since the time of Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fian of Ireland."

"Three — hundred — years," said Oisin in a slow voice, so nearly paralyzed was he by the shock of it. "But then where are Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna?"

"My son," said the Blessed Padraic, even more sadly, "they are in Hell."

"And where might that be?" asked Oisin. "Sure and it is a place I never heard of."

"It is known as the Land of Eternal Punishment," said the Blessed Padraic.

At these words, Oisin Mac Fion sat up straight in his chair, and the brightness of anger flared into his eyes. "The land of Eternal

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Punishment!" said he. "And why should Fion Mac Cumhaill and the men of the Fian go to such a place?"

"Indeed, they had no choice, my son. It was God's will."

"God's will, is it?" said Oisin, growing even angrier. "Well! I am altogether astonished! What did Fion Mac Cumhaill ever do to deserve such a thing? What did he ever do besides care for widows and orphans, give food and gold to the poor, establish justice throughout the land, and give battle to enemies who would destroy Ireland?

"Did he ever kill any human being except in a fair fight, and for just reasons? *He did not!* Did he ever take anything from another by thievery? *He did not!* Did he ever take anything from anyone by force, except it had been stolen and was another's by right? *He did not!* Did he ever force any woman against her will? *He did not!* Did he ever, indeed, lie with any woman, save she were his lawful wife? *He did not!* Did he ever, in his entire lifetime, commit any dishonorable crime? I say *He did not!* and again *He did not!*

"Then why, Priest Padraic, has he been sent to the Land of Eternal Punishment?"

The Blessed Padraic remained calm. "My son, it is God's will," said he again. "You must understand that Fion Mac Cumhaill did not know God, nor did he know His Blessed Son, Our Lord."

Oisin Mac Fion stood up, towering to his great height, glaring down at the priest. "Do you mean to say," said he, "that this God of yours is putting Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna through eternal punishment *because they had not been properly introduced?*"

"My son!" said the Blessed Padraic, astonished. "You do not at all —"

"Because," went on Oisin without pause, "if He is, then He is no God for me, and I reject Him altogether!"

The Blessed Padraic leaped to his feet. "My son! My son! Think what you say!"

"I have that!" said Oisin. He pointed a finger at Padraic. "And don't be forever calling me 'my son,' either! My name is not Oisin Mac Padraic, and, besides, I'm three hundred years older than you!"

There is no point in recounting the rest of this quarrel between the two, for it continued, off and on, for a long time over the years. Indeed, it lasted all their lives, which was a considerably long time. And the main reason for the continuing agrument was that the two of them had grown up at entirely different times, and neither could completely understand the other. Today this is called the

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"generation gap," and you must admit that a generation gap of three hundred years is a considerable gap, indeed.

Now, you may ask what all this argument between Oisin and the Blessed Padraic might have to do with what happened to the Fianna and the Lord of the Fianna, Fion Mac Cumhaill. And that is a very good question. So if you will be so good as to bear with me, you will find out.

When they had come in through the great door that led into the warm place from the grey, foggy desert outside, the Fianna, with Fion Mac Cumhaill in the lead, were welcomed heartily by tall, strong-seeming folk who wore scarlet robes and hoods. They had handsome faces and pleasant smiles and friendly ways, and one who was the spokesman said: "Fion Mac Cumhaill! Do be welcome! Our High King has told us that you would be coming, and we have prepared a great feast of good meat and good mead, and we have built warm fires to take the chill from your poor bones and dispel the cold that is within you. First, a good warm bath for the lot of you! Then some fine warm clothes, and then off to the Great Hall for meat and drink, where you'll be meeting our High King. Now come along with you! Follow me!"

And follow him they did, down corridors whose walls glittered with gorgeous designs wrought in chalcedony, agate, carnelian, garnet, and ruby gems, and the cross beams in the ceilings were covered with red gold that gleamed brightly in the torchlight. Never had any of the Fiana seen such tapestries as hung the wall, tapestries of hunting and battle scenes in rich, bright colors, and woven through with metallic gold and silver threads. Never had a single one of the Fianna ever even dreamed of such great magnificence, and they all stared in awe, speaking no word as they went.

And they were taken to quarters half again as big as Almu of the White Walls and a thousand times as splendid, where they were bathed in marble tubs with warm water and rich, sweet-smelling soap by attendants who obeyed their every wish. And when they were all clad in garments the like of which no King in Ireland had ever seen before, they began to assemble in the hall which had been given them, in order to go to the Great Hall for the feast.

Fion Mac Cumhaill was the first of them ready for the feast, and he stood alone in the huge hall. He was richly clad in a tunic and trews of soft saffron wool, with boots of softest deerhide. Around his shoulders was a great cloth-of-gold

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cloak lined with purple silk and clasped with a golden gorget set about with emeralds. And about his head was a golden circlet with a single emerald in the front as big as the end of his thumb.

The second to arrive was Osca Mac Oisin, whose clothing was only a shade less magnificient than that of his grandfather.

"Ah, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said he, "is it not wonderful to be here after all that dreaful trudging around in that grey, cold, foggy desert of sand?"

"So it would seem," said himself thoughtfully. "But what about their eyes?"

"Eyes?" said Osca, somewhat astonished. "What have eyes to do with it at all? Whose eyes do you mean?"

"Our hosts," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Have you seen their eyes?"

"I cannot say that I have," said Osca, after thinking a moment. "At least, indeed, I did not look closely. There was entirely too much else to be looking at. What about their eyes?"

"See for yourself, Osca," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Over by the doorway is an attendant waiting to lead us to the Great Hall for the feasting. Go ask him how soon we should be ready for the feast, and when he answers be sure to be looking at his eyes."

Osca did as he was bid. He went to the attendant and said: "How soon should the Fiana be ready for the feast? We have not been told."

The attendant made a medium bow, then looked at Osca and said: "My lord, there is no need to hurry. The festivities will not begin until our High King arrives, and he has said that he will gladly wait for the Fianna before making his appearance, however long that may be."

As he spoke, Osca looked into his eyes and saw — nothing.

Nothing, for there were no eyes. Only darkness.

Between the open eyelids, there was a blackness. Not the shiny black of jet, nor yet the dull, flat black of slate. It was an empty blackness, like the cold, dark, deep spaces between the stars in the sky of a winter's night, going on forever into utter emptiness. No deepest cavern beneath the earth, where the sun had never touched, could ever have been blacker than those eyes.

An awful coldness thrilled up and down the spine of Osca Mac Oisin, but not a trace of that feeling showed in his face, and he spoke politely to the attendant before walking back to the place where Fion Mac Cumhaill stood waiting for him.

"I saw that darkness," said Osca to his grandsire. "What does it mean?"

"Be thinking on it," said Fion

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Mac Cumhaill. "We shall wait, and we shall see."

When the men of the Fian had all come together, all richly clad, the attendant led them all down the corridors to the Great Hall.

And such a hall it was!

It was at least a hundred paces long and just as wide, and it was filled with long tables, around which sat a host of the scarlet-clad minions of the High King of this place. They were not all dressed alike; the cut of the clothes was different, one from another, and some wore more gold or silver trim than others, but the color of the cloth was always the same, and Fion Mac Cumhaill realized that none of the Fianna had been given garb with even a touch of scarlet in it.

The Fianna were welcomed roundly by the shouts of the High King's men and were shown to their places at the tables in the center of the Great Hall, while Fion Mac Cumhaill and a dozen of his best men were shown to places of honor at the High Table, with Fion Mac Cumhaill himself seated at the right of the empty throne.

Suddenly, there was a mighty blast of musical trumpets, and the entire assembly rose to their feet, whereupon the High King entered to take his throne.

He was tall and lean, with a small beard and mustache and a dark smile on his handsome face, and he was more richly dressed than anyone else in that great crowd. His eyes were the same fathomless black as all the others of his people.

He bade the Fianna welcome in a rich smooth voice and ordered the feast to begin.

Now, there is no point in giving all the details of such a feast, for it would be beyond the comprehension of the likes of you and me. Imagine, if you will, what it would be like to be so long without food and drink as the Fianna had been, with never a morsel of anything whatever passing your lips, and never even a drop of water touching your throat. Imagine it; then think of what it would be like to have even a small bowl of thin plain porridge after all that time. Would it not be wonderful?

Then think what it must have been like for the Fianna to be served heaping dishes of pork and beef and mutton and fish, all cooked to perfection, and great horns of mead and wine and ale and beer, whatever they wanted. They had no way of knowing how long it had been since anything but sand had touched their lips, but they knew what it was to be feasted after so long a time.

And during it all, the High King spoke to those around him in his rich smooth voice, but mostly he

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spoke to Fion Mac Cumhaill, who listened attentively and answered politely, as became a guest, while he tried to fathom the mystery of these people.

"Welcome you are, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said the High King, "and it is altogether glad I am to see you at last."

"You do us honor," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "Is it permitted that I ask a question?"

"Question away, and answers will be given you," the High King said.

"Well, now," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "you know my name, but may I ask what name is on *you?*"

The High King laughed softly. "I have many names, Fion Mac Cumhaill, but the one of which I am fondest is Lucifer."

"Bringer-of-Light," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, who knew his Latin well. "A goodly name it is, and certainly my men and I were glad to see the light of this place after so long in the grey wasteland. May I ask what land this is?"

"It is called Sheol."

"And the meaning of that?" asked Fion Mac Cumhaill, who knew no Hebrew whatever.

"It is also called Hell," King Lucifer continued, "which is to say 'The Hidden Land.'" For he did not want to tell Fion Mac Cumhaill that "Sheol" means "The Land of the Dead," and so he avoided the question altogether.

"And hidden well it is," said the lord of the Fianna, "for it took us long enough to find it. Is that cold foggy desert part of your realm, King Lucifer?"

Now Fion Mac Cumhaill was looking into the High King's utterly black eyes when he asked that question, and he thought he saw a sudden spark of far-off orange light in the depths of them, but so quickly did it come and go that he could not be sure.

"Indeed it is not," said the High King, "although there are some who think so, and I would not discourage them from so thinking."

"Indeed? And why is that?"

And again he thought he saw that spark of light in the eternal darkness of Lucifer's eyes.

"Far on the other side of it, far beyond it," said the High King in a low voice, "is the country ruled by a great enemy of myself and my people, and the grey wasteland is a barrier between us. And do not ask me more on that subject, Fion Mac Cumhaill, for there has been a great and powerful geas laid upon us all which prevents us from mentioning the name of that land or the name of its ruler, and, indeed, anything else about it. Other questions will be answered freely."

And so they talked all through

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the meal, but Fion Mac Cumhaill very quickly realized that, although King Lucifer did indeed answer every question he was asked, the answers gave no satisfaction. Once, the lord of the Fian asked: "What year is it, Lucifer?" And the High King said: "Well, now, we don't reckon time here as you do in Ireland. You must understand that time is not constant; it is variable. You'll recall that when you were young, a bright summer seemed to last forever, but when you grew older, summers went by like days. Now, according to many philosophers...."

And so on and so on. Fion Mac Cumhaill asked many questions, and he got as many answers, but he knew no more afterward than he had before.

At last, when the feasting was done and every man of the Fianna was chock-full to his wishbone, Lucifer the High King of Hell addressed them all as follows:

"Men of the Fian of Ireland, again I bid you welcome to our Hidden land. I am hoping that you are all feeling well fed and comfortable, eh? Good, for I am afraid that I have a bit of bad news for you, which I have withheld until this time, and that bad news is that you can never again go back to Ireland.

"Now, do not look so sad, I beg of you. It is too bad, I will agree, and I would gladly return you to your homes if I could, but it is not within my power to do so, for which I am heartily sorry. But it is not so bad as all that, for you may remain here as my honored guests for as long as you care to stay, and indeed it is my belief that you will never leave us. Hell is a rich land, and I will see to it that you are all provided with food and drink and fine clothing and a warm hearthfire whenever you need them. Our climate is quite warm here, and winter never comes, but a good fire gives more than warmth.

"Our countryside is pleasant and green, and the mountains and leas abound in game, and our rivers are full of fish, all of which is yours for the taking. You will be free to roam the woods and hills of Hell as you once did the woods and hills of Ireland. Hell is yours, Fianna!"

As you might well imagine, there was a great deal of cheering at these words, and when the cheering was done, Lucifer the High King went on:

"And of course you will be provided with steeds and hounds and arms and armor, the finest my realm can provide, which is very fine, indeed, I may tell you without boasting.

"Now it has been my experience that fighting men are fighting men because they like to fight. Will any here deny that?"

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A wave of hearty laughter went through the Great Hall at this sally, and the High King smiled. "So I thought," said he.

"Well, then," said he, "you will be wanting to keep in fine fighting fettle, will you not? Of course you will. So, as your host who wishes you well, I decree this: One day in seven, the men of the Fian will divide themselves into two groups by fair lottery, and you will fight shield against shield, sword against sword, spear against spear, from dawn until dusk or until one side bests the other, whichever comes first."

At these words, a sudden silence settled over the Fianna. They had come to know and to love each other so well during the long trek in the grey wasteland that not a one of them had any desire to fight any other.

"Now hold," said Lucifer the High King, raising a hand. "Do not take what I say amiss. For there is one thing that you must understand, and that is that you are now immortal."

The silence remained, but it was now a silence of astonishment and awe, and the Fianna listened with care to the words of the High King.

"On each fighting day, many of you will receive grievous wounds, and many of you will be slain. But such is my power that I give you my word of honor that when dusk has come every man will be whole and alive again, and the pain of the deepest wound will be no more than the prick of a needle. And in the evening, there will be a great feast, and I, myself, will give prizes and awards and gifts to the best fighters of the day. What say you to that?"

There was murmured agreement, but no wild cheering.

"I well understand," said Lucifer O Hell. "You must wait and see for yourselves, and I do not blame you at all. But I swear to you this, that there is but one Power in the universe that can slay you entirely and permanently, and of that Power I will speak anon.

"Now," said he, "you may well ask why I might be doing all this, for what I am offering you is far and above that which a host owes to his guests by right, and you would be right in asking such a question, and so I will answer it.

"As I have already told your great leader, Fion Mac Cumhaill, the realm of Hell has one great Enemy, and He is the Power of which I spoke but a moment ago. And, as I also told the lord of the Fian, I and my people are under an unbreakably powerful geas not to speak the name of the Enemy nor the name of His land, nor, indeed, anything about Him at all. But I *can* tell you this: My Enemy is One you have never heard of and do not

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know, and so you would do yourselves no dishonor to fight with me against Him.

"For long and long, for far longer than you could understand, we two have fought, for the Enemy wishes to destroy me and my land and everything we stand for. There have been no great battles between us as yet. Long ago, there were a few skirmishes, and occasionally there are still individual combats between my agents and His, but mostly we have been fighting what will, in a future time, be called a 'cold war' because —"

He paused and looked at the Fianna. "You have all played chess, I know. Well, then, you know the kind of game where each side is maneuvering for position, where a pawn or two may be taken, but the major pieces have not been touched, and both sides are fighting for control of the center of the board. Well, that is what we are doing, and both of us know that eventually the great battle must come, and we both know where it will be. We will come to battle at a place known as the Plain of Har Meggidon, and after the battle, there will be nothing but the final mopping up by the winning side.

"Men of the Fian, I assure you that I did not start this war; all I have ever asked is to be allowed to live in peace. But my Enemy has harassed me and my people and my friends for long and long, and I will not put up with it. Therefore, the war will be fought to the end, and I, myself, intend to be the winner of that final battle." And the High King of Hell paused and looked at each of the Fianna in turn before he went on.

"And with the Fian of Ireland, led by Fion Mac Cumhaill, fighting by my side, I know I cannot lose," said he.

And at those words, there was more cheering from all over the Great Hall, and when it had quite ended, the High King of Hell said: "Now no man comes to me but of his own free will. Therefore, I ask you to work hard and train hard and play hard, and when you have come to your decision, let me know.

"I have faith in you, Fianna, and I hope you will have faith in me. And thank you for listening."

And a great cheer came from every throat in the Great Hall.

Except for the throat of Fion Mac Cumhaill.

Now let us leave Fion Mac Cumhaill to his problems for a bit and see what has been happening in Ireland, for, as I have told you, the things that happened between Oisin Mac Fion and Priest Padraic are very important to this story and must be told in their place.

Oisin, as you will recall, had once been the finest harper in

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Ireland, and so he became again, for the Blessed Padraic had caused to be made, by one of the finest artisans in Ireland, a lovely and beautiful harp of gold and silver and fine inlaid woods, and had given it to Oisin, and that harp has remained to this day the symbol of Ireland.

And, in spite of being better than three hundred years old, Oisin had gained strength and agility from being again in the lovely land of Eire, and his fingers became as supple and clever as ever. Due to old age, his voice had become higher in pitch, but it was still as beautiful as ever, and Oisin Mac Fion became the first Irish tenor.

So Oisin sang the poetic tales of the adventures of Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna, and they were written down by Breogan, the personal scribe of Blessed Padraic, and he made a book of them, called the *Agallam na Seanorach,* but since there was no way in those days to write down music, we have only the words today, for which we should all be thankful indeed.

Now Blessed Padraic was a good, kindly, and saintly man, as we all know, and part of his reason for giving Oisin the harp and having his songs written down was to preserve the old tales and to make Oisin as happy as he could be. But it must be told that the main reason was to *shut Oisin up!*

For you must understand that the truth is that Oisin Mac Fion always and forever kept harping back to the injustice of God in putting Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna in Hell. And the argument between them, over the long years, grew often hot and heavy, and the only way the good Father Padraic could quieten Oisin down was to ask him to tell another story of the Fianna, which the son of Fion Mac Cumhaill would always do, accompanying himself on his fine new harp.

The whole of the blame for these arguments — and let it be known that they never degenerated into quarrels — cannot be laid entirely upon Oisin, for if the blessed archbishop had kept his own mouth shut, it is likely that Oisin would have forgotten the entire argument altogether. But to be quiet was exactly what Father Padraic could *not* do. As Apostle to the Irish, it was his God-sworn duty to bring the Gospel of Christ to every Irishman, and there was no doubt whatever that Oisin Mac Fion was an Irishman, so ....

Well, you can see.

Now by this time, Blessed Padraic had set up his permanent headquarters at Armagh in Ulster; and one day himself and Oisin were watching the workmen build the fine new cathedral church and the monastery nearby, and the two of

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them got into it again. The holy archbishop had begun by trying to explain the Doctrine of Free Will, and Oisin had got his back up and was bristling like a wild boar with an arrow in his ham.

"Now just a minute, Paddy, my body," said he. (You must understand that after all the years, they were old friends, and that no one else in all Ireland could so address Padraic.) "Just one blessed minute! Free Will, is it? We can do anything we like, can we? Was it then by His own free will that Jesu Mac Jehovah went to the Cross? Then why, in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night in which He was betrayed, did He pray 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Yet not as *I* will, but as *you* will'? What kind of free will is that, may I ask?"

"Well, now, that is just what you do not seem to be able to understand, Oisin," said Father Padraic. "*His* will was *God's* will, and therefore ..."

And off they went again, round and round, as ever they had over the years.

So it was that they did not notice the aged figure toiling towards them as they continued their discussion.

The man was tall — almost as tall as Oisin — but he was slightly bent with his age. He was wearing a robe of good grey wool, and the warm summer sun shone bright on his bald head which was fringed round with long white locks that hung to his shoulders. His upper lip was shaven smooth, but his snow-white beard was so long that he had tucked the end of it into the soft deerhide belt that he wore round his narrow waist. Under his left arm, he carried a number of books, and there was a soft smile upon his lips as he approached Oisin and the holy archbishop.

"Your pardon, Most Reverend Sir," said he. "I have come to return these books."

The argument stopped, and Father Padraic turned round and gave his lovely blessed smile to the old man. "Ah! Finegas it is!" said he. "And have you read them all?"

"That I have and several times over," said the old man, "and I thank you for the load of them. Indeed, I would like to borrow some more again of your fine books, for I have long had a thirst for knowledge."

"And have them you shall," said the Blessed Padraic. "Oh, dear, I have forgotten my manners. Finegas, this is Oisin Mac Fion, of whom you have doubtless heard."

"Indeed I have," said Finegas, "and glad it is I am to meet so famed a hero at last."

And the three of them sat down on a great block of sun-warmed stone and began to talk together.

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"Are you now a Christian, Finegas?" asked Oisin Mac Fion.

"Well, now, there are some would say I am, and there are some would say I am not," said old Finegas, "for while I believe in the philosophy of He Who is called Jesu Mac Jehovah — which is to say that I believe in the kindness and goodness of one's fellow man which He preached, and the belief in the Great God, which He also preached — I have not yet undergone the pouring-on-of-water. So it is hard to say whether I am a Christian or not. Father Padraic, here, would say I am not."

The Blessed Padraic smiled, shook his head slowly, and said not a word. He had given a sign to a deacon who was working nearby, and the deacon had taken the books which Finegas had brought, and went off to return them to the bottle where Padraic was temporarily living while the cathedral was being built. He would bring back soon the books which Padraic had asked him to bring to loan to Finegas for his further knowledge of Christianity. But Padraic said not a word to either Oisin nor Finegas, for he wished to listen to Oisin argue with someone else besides himself.

And Oisin was saying, "Well, Finegas, you know of Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna, and of the deeds they did so long ago?"

"Indeed I do, Oisin Mac Fion; indeed I do." The old man chuckled softly. "Indeed, I know them well."

"Well, then, since you seem a wise and learned man," said Oisin, "I will ask you a question. Or rather two questions, and they are these: Do you think that Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fian are indeed in Hell, and, if so, do you see any reason why they should be there?"

"Well, as to that," said Finegas, "let me answer your second question first. If, indeed, the God which Father Padraic preaches has sent them to Hell, then there must be a reason for it. For I am sure you understand that, in order to accept the assumption that Padraic's God sent them there, we must accept the assumption that Padraic's God exists. Is this not true, Oisin Mac Fion?"

"I could not disagree with your logic if I wanted," said Oisin. "Go on."

"Good, then," said Finegas. "Accepting that as an assumption, we must also assume that Padraic's God is wise and just and reasonable, as Padraic says He is. And if that is so, then the Fianna are in Hell for a reason, and a good reason it must be. Will you accept that for the sake of argument?"

"Gladly," said Oisin. "Continue."

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"Fine. But Padraic teaches that his God is inscrutable and that His ways are beyond us, no matter how just and reasonable they may be. Therefore we must conclude, do you see, that if the Fianna and Fion are indeed in Hell, then there is a good reason for it that perhaps we cannot possibly understand.

"Now we come to your first question, are they indeed in Hell at all, which, you will see immediately, is a far more complex question than the other.

"For before we can ask whether there is anybody in such-and-such a place, we must first ask if there *is* such a place. I, myself, have never visited Hell, nor have I met anyone who has, nor even heard of anyone who has. Therefore, I have no direct evidence that there is such a place. If, however, we accept the testimony given by the Gospel which Father Padraic preaches, we are forced to conclude that Hell exists, but we have no proof whatever that there is anyone in it, at all. Which leaves, as you see, the entire question in the realm of speculation, in no way provable by scientific logic."

"Now wait just a moment," said Oisin, interrupting. "If there is such a place, then Fion Mac Cumhaill is either in it or he is not. How do we resolve *that* question?"

"Why, as to that," said Finegas, "we need more evidence."

At that moment, there was an interruption caused by the deacon who was bringing more books for Finegas to read.

"I suggest, Finegas," said the holy archbishop softly, "that you read this one first — *The City of God*, by Bishop Augustine."

"I shall, indeed," said Finegas.

But Oisin Mac Fion was not a man to be distracted. "Evidence?" said he. "What sort of evidence might you be having in mind?"

"Why, that is very simple," said Finegas. "If you and Padraic were to die, you would have the solution to your argument immediately, for if you end up in Hell, Fion Mac Cumhaill will either be there or he will not. And if you end up in Heaven, he will either be there or he will not. If he is not in one place, then he will be in the other, and that will settle the question directly."

And Finegas stood up to leave, with his new-borrowed books tucked under his arm.

"That seems, if I may say so," said Oisin, "to be a rather drastic solution to an argument."

"Perhaps it is," said Finegas, taking his leave. "But have no fear; you will come round to it eventually." And off he went, down the hill towards his own place.

In the hills of Hell, Fion Mac Cumhaill sat on a mossy hummock

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with Osca Mac Oisin, watching some of the Fianna skin and dress a great fallow deer of the kind that is now known as the Irish elk.

"Well, Osca," said he, "another successful hunt."

"It was indeed," agreed Osca. "The horses performed beautifully, the hounds performed as well, and when Dearmid O Duivna cast the spear, it went directly to the mark."

"Just like yesterday, when Goll Mac Morna killed the boar," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

"And just like the day before," said Osca.

"And just like the day before that," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

In silence, the two of them looked about the countryside as the light faded slowly, for you must understand that in Hell the days came and went as they had not in the grey wasteland. But they were not days as you or I know them, for during the times of light, the whole sky became a pearly grey all over, and during the darkness there was utter black up there, like the eyes of the folk who dwelt in Hell. There was never a sight of sun or moon or stars, only the progression of change from light to dark and back again. There was not even a way to tell how long the days and nights lasted, for sometimes they seemed very short, and at other times seemed as if they would never end.

And there was something about the countryside that Fion Mac Cumhaill could never quite bring himself to like; there was a broodiness over it, and the colors were all dim and greyed and just slightly out of focus, as if they were not quite real.

"Tomorrow is another battle day," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

"It is that," agreed Osca Mac Oisin.

Again they sat quietly, for there was forever about them the feeling that they were being watched. They had long ago noticed one peculiar thing about the animals in this place, and that was that while the game animals had eyes just like the eyes of the deer or boars of Ireland, the horses and the hounds had the black and empty eyes of the denizens of Hell, and there always seemed to be one of them about, watching the Fianna with those dead-dark eyes.

"Well, now," said Fion Mac Cumhaill after a time, "I am thinking we should climb up yonder tree and get our bearings before it gets too dark to see. Come along, Osca."

And they went off to the tall tree and climbed up its thick trunk, from limb to limb until they reached very near the top, where the branches became so thin that the weight of Fion Mac Cumhaill and Osca Mac Oisin bowed them

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down. For, you see, since there was no sun or moon to judge direction by, it was necessary to get up to some high place from which they could see the towers and spires of the great castle of Lucifer the High King of Hell; which, for some reason was always visible from everywhere in Hell, and not matter how far the Fianna roamed, the castle was never beyond the horizon.

As the queer days had passed, Fion Mac Cumhaill had made a practice of sending two men up the nearest tall tree to look for the castle of the High King, for it gave each of the Fianna a chance to talk away from the ears and the bottomless black eyes of the hounds and the horses and the servants which had been provided by King Lucifer.

Now you must understand that many and many a day had passed since the Fianna had been welcomed to Hell. They did not know how many days had passed — a hundred? a thousand? ten thousand? — they did not know, for they had lost count long ago. At first, it had all seemed wonderful indeed. Six days of glorious hunting the elk and boar and bear and deer that teemed in the forests and meadows of Hell, and every seventh day a joyous battle with swords and spears, with the wounded and the dead feeling fine and hearty as soon as darkness came. But how many ways can a man kill or be killed? Even the thrill of the hunt and the battle can lose its savor after long enough a time, for a man begins to get the feeling that he has done all this before. And after long and long a time, all the things that the Fianna had done had blended together like an Irish stew that has been boiled too much and too long, so that the pieces of meat and potatoes and vegetables have lost their individuality and become nothing but a mess of tasteless mushy stuff.

The trouble, you see, is that nothing *new* ever happens in Hell. There were not any new stories to be told, for after a time all the stories had been told and there were no new ones. There were not even any new people to meet and talk to; indeed, if anyone from outside the realm had arrived before or after the coming of the Fianna, they knew nothing of it, and Fion Mac Cumhaill reasoned, after much biting of his thumb of knowledge, that any others must be in some part of Hell that he knew not of and could not reach.

The fact of the matter was that Fion Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna were deadly bored.

And Fion Mac Cumhaill reasoned that if anything new were to happen, himself must make it happen. And himself had a plan.

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He spoke of it first to Osca Mac Oisin, and then to Dearmid O Duivna. The word spread slowly among the Fianna, for they could only speak a few minutes at a time, and only two at a time, when they climbed the tall trees of an evening. But that was no handicap, for they had all the time there was.

And on this day, at the top of the tall tree they had climbed, Fion Mac Cumhaill and Osca Mac Oisin took careful measure and bearing of the great castle of the High King of Hell, and then Osca said: "Are we ready for tomorrow, Fion Mac Cumhaill?"

"Indeed we are ready," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

And they went back down the tree without a further word.

Before the queer dawn of the next day, the men and officers of the Fian were wearing their battle dress and were armed for combat, for the fighting they knew was to come that day, as it had come every seventh day for so long and long a time. But this would be different.

The Fianna were assembled in the large hall which had been given them in the castle of the High King of Hell, and they were waiting for King Lucifer, knowing he would come, for he came every Battle Day, and nothing ever changes in the Kingdom of Hell. And, sure enough, in the hour before dawn, the High King and his retinue came into the hall to discuss the coming combat.

"Hail to you, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said King Lucifer. "Are your men prepared for the day's fighting?

"That we are," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

"And you have chosen your sides by lot?" asked the High King.

"We have not," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

"Indeed?" Once again, Fion Mac Cumhaill saw a sling of red-orange in the fathomless depths of the High King's black eyes. "And why not, if I may ask?"

Fion Mac Cumhaill's voice was easy. "We have trained long enough, King Lucifer. Overtrained soldiers are not good fighting men; we are now as ready as ever we will be. And so we are determined, all of us, to go to the Enemy you have told us about."

The High King of Hell shook his head sadly. "That cannot be, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said he, "for the time of the Battle of Har Meggadon is not yet come. Be sure that I will tell you when the time has come. Until then, continue as you have done. Come, now, choose up your sides and let us continue with our accustomed fighting."

"That we will not," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "We will march out of here today by the way we came in, and we will march across the

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grey wasteland until we come to the land of your Enemy. That we shall do, and not you nor all your legions shall stand against us."

This time, the eyes of King Lucifer blazed a bright red-orange, like the coals of a fire when they are fanned by a strong wind. When he spoke, his voice was hard, and strong, and harsh, like the snarl of a cornered wolf.

"Fion Mac Cumhaill, do you dare to defy ME?"

"That I do," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, as cool as ever. And without taking his eyes off the eyes of the King of Hell, he said: "Men of the Fian, follow me."

And he began to walk toward the King, who stood between himself and the door.

The red-orange still blazed in the King's eyes as he turned to one of his chief nobles and said: "Minazel, come with me! We shall teach these fools not to disobey me, and we shall teach them the might of the Legions of Hell!"

And, quite suddenly, Lucifer and his minions were gone.

Fion Mac Cumhaill did not stay his pace one whit. Sword in hand, he led the Fianna through the door and out into the corridor beyond. And the corridor was as empty as a bride's nightgown.

"Straight ahead, my boys," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, "and let nothing stay you from your path. Rear guard, keep watch; they may likely attack from behind."

They had marched but a few paces when the lighting of the corridor became suddenly dim and red and smoky, and the walls changed ever so little and yet ever so much, for it was plain that they were in a long cavern of some sort, not in a corridor of a stone-walled castle.

"Let's keep moving, my dears," said the Captain of the Fian. "No matter what tricks they may play upon us, never lose sight of the goal. Keep moving forward. Dearmid, darling, stay here at the point with me; Osca, you and Goll Mac Morna take the rear guard. Move out!"

And on they went, spears at the ready, prepared, they hoped indeed, for anything that might happen.

Now you must understand that time and space are relative everywhere in the entire universe, but they are even more so in Hell. How far the Fian moved down that smoky red-lit Hellish cavern, or how long it took them, they could not know, but it seemed only a short time before they came upon the serried ranks of fathomless-eyed warriors in scarlet battle dress — the dreaded First Cohort of the Legions of Hell.

Led by Fion Mac Cumhaill, the men of the Fian did not falter. In

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perfect array, they surged forward to close the distance. They attacked even before the First Cohort was quite ready for them. The Hellish troops were no match whatever for the Fianna. Lucifer's warriors fought hard, but they were slashed and cut and trampled underfoot by the charging Irishmen, and the thick, purplish ichor that oozed from their veins instead of blood made the floor of the cavern slippery underfoot.

The men of the rear guard, under Osca Mac Oisin and Goll Mac Morna, had little to do but further stamp on the writhing forms of the beaten warriors of the First Cohort, smashing their brittle bones beneath Irish feet.

"Take care!" Osca shouted to Goll Mac Morna. "Eyes rear! Look at that!"

They stared in astonishment, for, well behind the moving soldiers of the Fian, the crushed and battered bodies of the warriors of Hell were drawing themselves together again and getting up from the ichor-stained floor of the cavern. Somehow, they seemed smaller than before. They faced the rear guard of the Fianna with their black endless-dark eyes.

Osca and Goll and their men prepared to fight a rear guard action.

But the legionnaires of the First Cohort turned and ran, chittering like bats flying from a cave, pursued by a man with a torch.

In the vanguard, Fion Mac Cumhaill, having smashed his spear against the enemy, had drawn his sword and was cutting them down like a man cutting wheat with a scythe.

All this is not to say that the Irish sustained no injuries, for indeed they did, but not a man of them was so badly wounded that he could not move forward with the rest.

Then suddenly there came the roar of a voice echoing through the red-lit smoky cavern, like that of a mad bear in pain:

"VERY WELL, FION MAC CUMHAILL! THEN IT IS TOTAL WAR!"

"SO MAY IT BE, LUCIFER O HELL!" bellowed Fion Mac Cumhaill, his great voice even louder and stronger than that of the High King of Hell.

At that, there was a flash of horrid flame all round the Fianna, and a roar of fire, as though some ancient forest of dead trees had suddenly caught fire everywhere about them.

And at the same instant the battle dress, the swords, the shields, and the spears which had been given the Fianna vanished utterly, as though they had never been.

Fion Mac Cumhaill did not

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hesitate. *"Men of the Fian!"* he shouted. *"Naked we came into this place, and naked we will get out of it! Keep moving!"*

The Fianna surged forward, ignoring the flames.

Now this, you may think, is a curious thing, for naked men do normally fear a great, roaring fire. And the way of explaining it is this:

The men of the Fian of Ireland had noticed a very strange thing during their stay in Hell. They had spent, you remember, a long time in the cold waste of the grey desert, where there was nothing but cold and hunger and thirst, and, at first, the warmth and the food and the drink of Hell had seemed pleasant. But they had soon come to notice that the warmth of Hell was only a surface thing, that it did not warm the flesh or the bones. And the feasts of Hell left them always with a curious hunger inside, while the drinks of Hell left within their mouths only a sort of slimy dryness, if you can imagine such a thing. Furthermore, they had discovered that the fires of Hell cannot burn you unless you let them.

Straight into the flames of Hell charged the Irish heroes.

And they were faced with Lucifer's Second Cohort.

Now, these did not bear the likenesses of men. Imagine, if you will, the head of a starving horse with the teeth of a wolf. Put that head on the body of a gaunt ape with hands like an eagle's feet. Just such a thing was one of the more pleasant of the horrendous things that blocked the passage of the Fian. Armed they were, with tooth and claw, with sword and axe and spear; armored, too, with scale and fur and hide like plate of steel. Fearsome, frightful, fighting fiends that flickered in the fire, facing, with their deep-dark eyes, the daring men of Eire.

Fion Mac Cumhaill smashed his mighty fist into the face of the first and foremost fiend, and felt the purple ichor slime his knuckles. Beside him, Dearmid O Duivna had one great hand around the throat of a thing that looked as if it were part snake and part warthog, fighting off its wicked claws with the other hand. Tough old Fergus Finvel fought fang and fingernail with a thing that might have been a spider or a worm or some horrible kind of cow. Daring Mac Dobar trampled underfoot a thing that looked and felt like a cross between an oily blanket and a wet bat, with tooth-filled, sucking mouths all over it. The thing that Conan Mac Lia was hammering to a pulp was utterly indescribable.

The trick was, you see, not to be afraid of the fiends. As long as the Fianna fought against them and were wary of their powers, the fiends could not win. The men, as

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someone said much later, had nothing to fear but fear itself.

And so they fought, on and on. The enemy could not be killed, but they could be beaten, and once they had been smashed and battered and trampled they lost all of their false courage and ran off into the flames.

And ever and ever the Fianna moved forward toward their goal — the door that led out to the endless grey foggy plain.

At long last, Fion Mac Cumhaill found himself face to face with a particularly horrid monster that he recognized immediately by the red-orange glare of its eyes.

"Well, Lucifer," said he, speaking just loud enough to carry above the din of the battle and the roaring fire.

"Well, Fion Mac Cumhaill," said the monster. "Will you yield?"

"Not very likely," said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

The two of them were maneuvering about each other like wrestlers looking for an opening, which, of course, they were.

"Let us be sensible," said Lucifer. "You said you and your men were ready to go out and fight my Enemy, and indeed I think that you have proven it that you are. If I let you go, will you go out and fight the Enemy as you said you would?"

"Your memory is surely better than that, Lucifer," said Fion Mac Cumhaill. "I said that all of us were determined to go to the Enemy. I said nothing whatever about fighting Him."

Lucifer's eyes blazed bright orange. "Indeed, Fion Mac Cumhaill. Indeed. Then I had best not let you go at all, had I? And unless I let you go, Fion Mac Cumhaill, you can never leave Hell."

"Meaning no offense," said Fion Mac Cumhaill, meaning all the offense in the world, "but I am thinking you are a liar. What if I should call upon your Enemy for help?"

The eyes of Lucifer blazed brighter, but he laughed a horrid laugh. "You do not even know His name, fool!"

Fion Mac Cumhaill put the tip of his thumb of knowledge between his teeth and bit hard. Then he said: "I am thinking that I could call upon the Name of the Anointed One if I wished."

And then Lucifer's eyes blazed yellow-hot, and with a horrendous scream he leaped straight for Fion Mac Cumhaill.

Fion Mac Cumhaill stepped to one side and smashed his fist into Lucifer while the demon was still in midair. Lucifer landed, rolled, and came to his feet. "You do not understand the awesome powers of Hell," Lucifer snarled.

"And *you* do not understand the awesome powers of myself,"

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said Fion Mac Cumhaill, kicking Lucifer neatly in the face. The monster's eyes glazed for a short moment, and Fion Mac Cumhaill grabbed him firmly by the ankles. Then, like a good Irish housewife shaking a rug, himself flipped Lucifer up and down and slammed him solidly against the ground. Three times, he did. And again three times. And finally, three times more.

Each time, Lucifer shrank a little until finally he was no bigger than a child. His eyes were glowing the dull red of fear when Fion Mac Cumhaill grasped him by the throat and lifted him up so that his feet were off the ground.

Around the two of them there was silence. All the Legions of Hell had fled, and the Fianna watched quite calmly.

"And now, Lucifer O Hell, do you let us go, or do I shout that Name so loud that it will echo down every corridor in Hell?" said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

"Go," said Lucifer in a rasping tinny voice. *"Go!"*

The flames died suddenly, and the door to the outside was revealed only two paces away.

Without letting go his grip, Fion Mac Cumhaill said: "Dearmid O Duivna, open the door."

Dearmid did so. Outside was the grey mist and the grey sand.

"Out, my dears! Out!" said Fion Mac Cumhaill to the Fianna. And out they went.

Then Fion Mac Cumhaill turned, and, like a man hurling a war spear, he flung Lucifer into the blackness of Hell.

Then he ran outside and slammed the door.

And at that moment a very stange thing began to happen. A warm wind blew, flinging the fog away, and a sun shone above, and the sand became warm and pale yellow. And a voice said: "Hail, Fianna. I give you greeting."

The Fianna turned away from the door and saw a figure clad in shimmering white, a person with a beautiful face that was neither old nor young. "Greeting to you, especially, Fion Mac Cumhaill." The being seemed to radiate warmth and love by his very presence.

"Greeting," said Fion Mac Cumhaill respectfully. "May I ask what name is on you?"

The person answered, but Fion Mac Cumhaill did not quite catch the name. "Mac Hael?" said he.

"That is close enough," said the being in a gentle voice. "I am a Messenger."

"A Messenger? May I ask from whom?"

"A Messenger from He Whom Lucifer designated his Enemy. It has been a long time, Fion Mac Cumhaill, but you and your Fian

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have won the fight. I have brought with me some friends of yours who are eager to see you." The Messenger gestured with one hand, and from the rapidly dissipating mist came three figures, three stalwart young men.

The Fianna and Fion Mac Cumhaill immediately recognized the first one, and their voices rang out in chorus: *"Oisin Mac Fion!"*

Oisin came forward and embraced and kissed his father, and Fion Mac Cumhaill could hardly speak. "It is good to see you again, my son," said himself at last. "Go to your son Osca; we have both missed you during this long time."

Then Fion Mac Cumhaill looked at the second man. "I know you," said he, "and yet I do not know you. You were never of the Fianna."

The man smiled and said: "Demna, my boy, do you not know me?"

Fion Mac Cumhaill's eyes became wide when he heard his childhood name. "Finegas! My teacher! Old Finegas, alive and young again!" And his voice choked up as Finegas kissed him.

Then, after a minute or two, he said: "Finegas, old friend, who is this man? I do not recognize him at all."

The third young man smiled benignly and said: "We have never met, Fion Mac Cumhaill, but I have always considered myself a friend of yourself, and I hope you will consider me the same. My name is Padraic."

Then came the voice of the Messenger: "Blessed Padraic, it is my suggestion that you explain everything that has happened, so that the Fianna may understand."

Now since I have already told you what happened, there is no need for me to go through the long conversation that followed, except to say that the warmth of friendship came upon every man as they talked.

At last, Fion Mac Cumhaill asked a question. "Father Padraic, I do not understand one thing. If Hell is the place of Eternal Punishment, how did we of the Fian escape it?"

The Blessed Padraic smiled. "Duanach Mac Morna told you what was inscribed over the door, did he not?"

"That he did. 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.'"

"Ah, then. You see, you did *not* abandon hope. And because of that you did not see the true Hell. You saw only the false front. But if you had abandoned hope, and given yourselves to Lucifer, you would have seen what Hell is *really* like, and you would have remained there for Eternity."

"And where do we go from here?" said Fion Mac Cumhaill.

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Blessed Padraic thought for a moment, then said: "Can you imagine a place that has all the good points of Ireland and none of its bad ones?"

Fion Mac Cumhaill smiled. "It sounds like Heaven."

"It is," said the Blessed Padraic.

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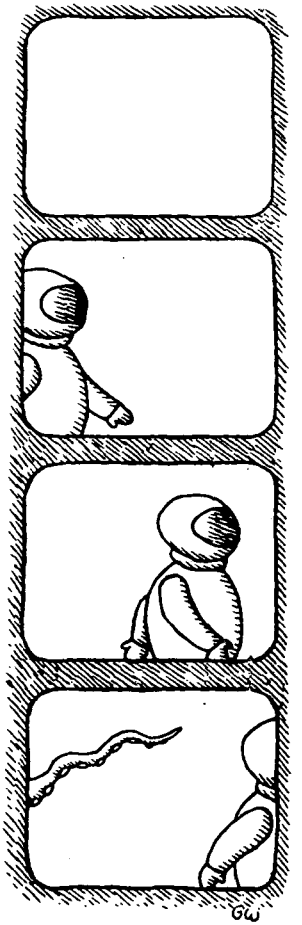
BAIRD SEARLES

Films

A slow month in my neighborhood: something about reincarnation at the nabes — I've had it with the *Exorcist*-occult spinoffs; a revival of *2001* at the Radio City Music Hall — much as I love it, I don't think I want to see it for another several years, particularly not with Rockettes attached; an update of *The Invisible Man* on TV — same old effects, and not even Una O'Conner to scream so piercingly. Why do these updated classics seem to lose all "sense of wonder"; everything is reduced to mundanity. It's more than just once too many times around; somehow Wells' individual researcher was more interesting than David MacCallum involved with corporation hanky-panky.

In any case, this special was the spin-off point for a series for next season, with the Invisible Man on the run a la "The Fugitive." I think we can write it off.

The best thing I've seen this month is about 5 minutes long; nevertheless, it's worth talking about. My local NET-TV station has been broadcasting a series called The International Animation Festival. Each half hour program features several animated films from all over the world. The prize so far was from Yugoslavia — a masterfully done adaptation of



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Poe's "Masque of the Red Death." It would especially be a revelation for those who still think of animation in terms of Disneyesque cuteness.

The story is told as succinctly as Poe himself did (which can't be said for many film adaptations of his work) with no additions or frills. And, of course, it is the style that makes it; in this case, the style of the pictures used to make up the animation (I know that's a simple minded statement, but it's amazing how many people *still* don't understand what style is; they think of it as some indefinable quality like *chic*).

The visual style here was akin to Duer etchings or medieval woodcuts (the nobles put me in mind of early sets of playing cards I've seen reproduced) though vividly colored. Perhaps the closest contemporary artist I can compare it to is Mervyn Peake and his superb drawings for his own Gormenghast trilogy (what an incredible animated film he could have made!).

On the same program was a very short work, also from Yugoslavia, about a winged man who became so intoxicated with speed that he came to a bad end, which was not so distinguished visually, and an American work called "The Mad Baker." This one was pretty funny stuff, about a mad scientist who lives in a castle over a bakery and has made a giant carniverous chocolate cake, which breaks loose in accepted monster fashion. There is a moment of Mel Brooksian insanity when they try to stop it with hot cross buns, and another when it gets caught on the revolving sails of a windmill.

I've caught several other goodies on The International Animation festival, and recommend it if it is scheduled in your locality.

A thought for the month...it has occurred to me, in my constant cogitation about s/f and fantasy that one reason, among many, for the field's rampant and increasing popularity is that there *aren't* more science fiction and fantasy movies. Think it through... the Western fan, the detective/murder mystery fan, even the "mainstream" reader, can get a lot of his fiction jollies from film and TV these days. But when the average "good" level in our field is represented by the various Planet of the Apes productions, we are stuck, willy or nilly, with reading.

Not comparing the media in any specific ways, but just in personal gut reaction — how many films have affected you as powerfully as *The City and the Stars* or *The Lord of the Rings* or *Dune* or *The Left Hand of Darkness* or whatever your upper echelon of favorites in print are? A few, I would guess, but

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quantitatively, the award must go to the printed word. The simplistic answer, of course, is to make more s/f and fantasy films.

I don't see it happening — in fact, I don't see it possible. Do you honestly think that the above mentioned classics, if made into films today, would be satisfying? A thousand to one they wouldn't be. Speculative fiction, by its very nature, is the literature of the mind's eye, and no camera and production crew can match the visions created by the capable author and the imaginative reader in combination. Diaspar will not be envisioned satisfactorily on a film set until the entire capabilities of production are magnified enormously (holographic backgrounds or some such, for instance). But take heart — this may mean that in a decade or so, we'll be the only literate people left.

Things-to-come-dept.... Despite the pessimism of the above, I can but keep notifying you of upcoming attempts. Irwin Allen, the disaster magnate, who has flirted with s/f before, has two for TV next season: "Forgotten World," described as "modern man against prehistoric monsters (now *there's* an original idea) and "Time Traveler" which is oddly enough about time travel.

Coming next month: 26th Anniversary Issue

October is anniversary month, and we've planned an exceptional issue for the celebration. Included will be:

- **CORDWAINER SMITH, with a never-before-published story (completed by his wife after his death) that demonstrates the unique imagination of this distinguished writer. Its title is "Down to A Sunless Sea."**
- **JACK WILLIAMSON with another actionful sf novelet about Blacklantern, entitled "Counterkill."**
- **RICHARD COWPER, primarily a novelist (*Clone, Twilight of Briareus*), contributes a remarkable novelet, "The Custodians," which is simply the best story about prophecy we have ever read.**
- **Plus, short stories by POUL ANDERSON, R. BRETNOR, CLIFFORD D. SIMAK and others. Watch for the October issue, on sale August 28, or send us the coupon on page 38.**

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The strange events surrounding the appearance in contemporary Hollywood of one washed-up director and one kid who wanted to be a star . . .

Valentino, Bogart, Dean and Other Ghosts

by RAYLYN MOORE and JOHN PENNEY

Even though he'd taken his librium, J. D. felt the shakes coming on, or imagined he did, which worked out to the same thing for practical purposes. And he knew from experience that having someone to talk with usually helped.

So he picked up the first hitchhiker he saw, stopping the Lincoln at the crest of a steep ridge eastbound on the highway that curls through Topanga.

It was high summer, hot as triple hell, and the airconditioner in the car had stopped working a long time ago. There wasn't even anything green outside to cool the eye, only greasewood against the sere yellow of sunscorched grass with an occasional madrone or manzanita registering as clumps of brown. The scene underwent professional appraisal and rejection by J. D.'s unconscious while consciously he was examining the kid standing there at the roadside with his thumb pointing at the meridian as if he might be calling J. D.'s attention to some phenomenon up there. Flyingsaucer maybe, buzzard more like it.

One of those newstyle crazies, J.D. decided after taking in the hard-to-believe clothes: a too-big double-breasted jacket from an old navy pinstripe suit worn with an open-throat, wilted, white shirt, faded bluejeans, and basketball sneakers. Or maybe, on second thought, some farm kid who'd run out of tractor gas and was thumbing in to the store for a fill-up. Except it was no gascan dangling from his left hand, but a package done up in brown paper and secondhand string with the firsthand knots still in it.

Too late J.D. remembered about all the violence around these days. Would the kid cut him up, dump him, take the wallet and the

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Linc? Well, he wouldn't get much for his trouble. The car was a fifty-eight. There was less than thirty in the wallet (J.D. was born too long ago to have gotten used to credit cards, had none) and in the back seat were only a dozen antique film reels and some scripts he'd bought at an auction for his private collection, along with a million jars of Beechnut babyfood which J.D. snacked on to appease a sneaky peptic ulcer.

"Hi there, son, going far?"

The kid had whipped open the door of the Lincoln as if he owned it and hopped right in and settled back, dropping his bindle to the floor between his feet. "Hollywood," he said. And the way it came out was like giving the order to Jerque the faithful chauffeur.

"I'm going into North Hollywood. That help?"

"Okay," the kid agreed. "But when we get there could you show me the way to the studios?"

"What?"

"I'm going to get me a job in the movies. Screen test. Be a star."

"What?"

"Like Gable, Orson Welles, Cagney. Picture in the Brown Derby, footprints at Graumanns, you know. I'm an actor."

"What?"

"Ma always says if you want it enough, you'll get it, if you work hard and don't take no crap from nobody. That Schwab's Drugstore trick won't always work, you have to go after it."

"Your ma's a real sharp thinker, sounds like," said J.D., stalling while he tried to get it together. The kid might be joking; yet the stuff he was saying didn't come out that way, and anyhow he wasn't old enough to make funnies about those names and places he'd ticked off. Unless he'd been taking one of those history-of-cinema courses the colleges were giving nowadays.

The kid was sticking a hand up beside the steering wheel. "Forgot to introduce myself. Name is Trevis Frayne. How'll that look printed in lights, huh?"

J.D. slewed sideways on the front seat and took the hand and shook it. When he turned back to face the road, he could feel the kid looking *him* over, even had a quick vision of himself through the eyes of his passenger: an old fart with the heavy wrinkles of his face preserved in bronze like a babyshoe, wearing a slate-blue wool beret, smoking the last inch of a coffin nail in a gen-oo-wine carved ivory holder. Very large, very black sunglasses. Paisley silk scarf tucked into the neck of a maroon shirt, and electric-blue slacks.

"Hey," the kid said finally. "I bet you got something to do with the movies yourself."

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J. D. tried hard to control his voice but couldn't keep from quavering like a goddamned siren even as he told the bare bones of truth. "I'm J. D. Cullen, a director. I work for one of the majors."

"Gol-*lee!*"

From the tail of his dim right eye J. D. could see the kid's adamsapple, like a laden freight elevator, make one long slow trip up and down. Curiously, he felt an icy-hot smarting on the linings of his eyelids, which certainly couldn't be tears. He hadn't cried for half a century. Maybe longer. However, it had been more than a quarter century since anyone had reacted to the name J. D. Cullen with much more than contempt, indifference at best.

The kid took a laundered-gray handkerchief from the pocket of the freaky pinstripe, shook it out, and daubed at his forehead. "Whoooeee!" he said. "How d'ya like them apples?" He rolled his eyeballs toward the top of his skull. "Not even in Hollywood yet and I run into a piece of luck that couldn't happen. I'm on my way now, Ma."

At this J. D. went cold all over, and the shakes started up in earnest so that he had to hang onto the wheel hard. "Now wait a minute here, son, I —"

The boy was looking at him again. "Just one of the greatest directors of all time, that's all. And *I* have the dumb luck to — listen Mr. Cullen, I hope you know I've got the stuff. I hope you know I'm not just any old ragged-ass kid that's hitched to Hollywood to see the sights and's going to end up broke and beat or making a living behind a gas pump instead of under the klieglights."

"*Klieg*lights!" J. D. hiccupped, and felt his ulcer give a warning twinge.

"Not that I wouldn't be willing to learn from you. Anything you could teach me about acting or the industry or anything I'd be much obliged."

Possible explanations unreeled wildly in J. D.'s head. It was some kind of stunt, a fraternity hazing, an elaborate practical joke being pulled on him by some old enemy (he certainly had plenty of them). Or maybe —? By god, they'd monkeyed around with everything else lately — the weather, the moon, motherhood, life and death — could it be they were messing around with time too?

But before panic set in he had the good fortune to get hold of himself, realize he was taking a fast drive in the direction of madness. Of course there was some simple explanation, and all he had to do was play by ear till it came out of its own accord. Cullen felt the pain in his gut ease a little. They'd left the

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open country now and were being gulped by the exurban maneating growth, approaching North Hollywood as promised.

J. D.'s passenger steadfastly ogled everything out the window as they drew into town, craning up at the higher of the buildings. What the hell, thought the man behind the wheel, if I dump this kook out somewhere now, I'll never find out who invented him. "I guess you know it's too late in the day to go job hunting," he told the boy. "Makes a bad impression. And I suppose you got no idea where you're going to stay?"

Trevis Frayne shook his head.

"Okay, then. You can come to my place."

"Gee, Mr. Cullen, I don't know how to thank —"

"It's nothing wonderful. Just a bachelor place out Mandeville Canyon."

Or maybe *he* was wrong and it *was* something wonderful, J. D. was thinking half an hour later, after he'd let his guest up the murky carpeted stairs of the old stucco house made over into apartments like a mistaken afterthought, and inserted a key in the door that always stuck and had to be shouldered open. For again he saw briefly through the kid's eyes as the visitor began wandering with reverent curiosity through the four rooms, every one of which — even the kitchen — was stacked to the windowsills and beyond with the material he'd been getting together over three decades or so.

Cans and cans of reels, stacks and stacks of thumbed-grimy scripts. Books of clips. Still shots. A few props, though these last were mostly personal souvenirs. No costumes. He left that kind of collecting to others. He was a specialist.

When he died, it would all go to a library, or a museum. The J. D. Cullen Collection. It would be the one thing he was remembered for, if he were remembered at all.

But now a layer of velveteen dust covered all except the sofa where he took his meals off an endtable with one game leg, and the kitchen sink and stove. "It's the maid's day off," he apologized when he saw the boy taking in the dirt along with the treasures.

Unhappily, the kid read the remark straight. "Gee, that's okay. You probably don't let her touch stuff as valuable as this anyhow."

To duck having to unscramble that one, J. D. threw open the door to the second bedroom which he used as a projection room, where a small screen was permanently fixed to an end wall, and projection equipment stood waiting, covered with a plastic hood. A narrow cot occupied some of the space between, with more scripts and

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things stacked on, under, and around it. "You can sleep here if you don't mind a little noise. I sit up late in here some nights running over my favorites. Teevee's in here too, but I never switch it on except for the late shows. It's the enemy after all. It's what killed us."

"Only thing is," Frayne said and swallowed, adamsapple bobbling, "ma always told me not to — now don't take this wrong, Mr. Cullen, but — well, you could do a hell of a lot for me, have already, offering to put me up and all, but what could I ever do for you? What I mean is, you're not queer, are you?"

J. D. roared laughing, and it hurt his chest because he hadn't laughed like that for so long. He was going to have to stop reacting, he decided. Any more such responses to goofy surprises from the boy and he'd be flat on his ulcer for a week sipping warm milk. And now that he was thinking along those lines, he remembered the boy must be hungry and probably didn't have a dime. There was nothing in the place to eat but yogurt and canned baby sauce. "Listen," he said, "relax. I promise I won't lay a finger on you. I've had four wives, all of them can vouch I'm straight, though that's about all they'd say for me, I guess. But what's more important now is dinner. How about if I go out and get a couple of steaks and a bucket of potato salad?"

"Naw," decided Trevis, looking down at his flat belly. "Not for me. You get what you want for yourself but I'm not hungry. And, anyway, I don't want to put on any flab before the screen test."

So the game was still on. Cullen looked at the boy with exasperation pushed to extremity, forgot about his decision to wait and see. "Okay," he said, "what is it with you? What's all this crap about screen test and studios and the Brown Derby?"

The kid just stared blankly, and J. D., beginning to be really annoyed, shouted at him. "What's the matter with you? That scene's been over for a long time. The majors are washed up. The indys have taken over. Hollywood's a ghost town. And nothing much moving in the industry except Disney and the porn crowd. Didn't anyone tell you?"

Trevis went on staring, kind of dreamily now. So Cullen went on talking, though he was feeling less and less well. "I don't know where you got all those notions of yours. Maybe you been living in somebody's attic full of old flick magazines. But you better wake up. You can't get to be a movie star any more, because the species no longer exists. The star system has blown a fuse. Take my advice. Get yourself

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a job checking in a supermarket and then wait, sit tight. The word is that Hollywood'll be back on the map when pay teevee takes hold. Too late for me, of course, but if you've really got the stuff you think you have —" Cullen's voice trailed off. His oddball visitor didn't seem to be taking it in at all. Selective listener, apparently, hearing only what he wanted to. Well, that would have to remain the kid's problem. J. D. wasn't going to make it his own, especially as sick as he was feeling now.

So okay, forget it. Talk about something else. Be a good host, entertain a little, then throw the boy out in the morning and be damned. J. D. asked if Trevis would like to see some of the reels, and Trevis heard that fast enough. So they sat around a few hours watching them roll, the kid so rapt his eyes turned to glass.

But if Cullen had thought Frayne was going to be put off all that easily, he was mistaken, as he learned just before Trevis curled up on the cot after the last reel was run. "Good night, Mr. C. Thanks for everything. Tomorrow can I go with you to the studio?"

This time he was feeling too low to fight it, and so he came on soft. "I don't go there every day any more, son. I'm what they call semi-retired. Just between you and me, I have this deal called a 'lifetime contract' that none of their shysters has figured out yet how to break. It doesn't pay me anything much, but it keeps me stuck in their craw. They can't dump me."

"When you do go, then. Or maybe we could make a special trip, to arrange about the screen test?"

J. D. had begun to realize he was really sick, the gut pain gnawing, and a tight band around his chest. "Listen," he said, "hit the sack now, will you? We'll talk some more in the morning."

That night was the worst Cullen ever spent. He tossed, sweated clammily, shook. Pain rolled over him in waves, blackness tried to swallow him up. Cold seemed to be creeping over him, beginning with his hands and feet. Migod! he thought, I'm dying, and he tried to roll over so he could pound on the floor to get the kid's attention in the other oom, tell him to get a doctor or an ambulance. But J. D. was either too weak to roll over, or he was dreaming that he was too weak, and so he just lay there gasping out his last.

After that, though, funnily enough, there was a big change. The pain floated off leaving him light-headed and light-spirited, better than he had been in years. Even the darkness went away — a surprise, he really hadn't expected to see another dawn — and he lay

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there thinking about Trevis Frayne, thinking that after all there was no question but that the kid really did have it, the pervasive male beauty (no other word for it, never had been, never would be) fixed at a point about halfway on the long road between Novarro and Cotten. And to paint the lily a bit, he had those headlamp eyes, like the young Paul Newman. The whole package, in fact, added up to the good chance he really could have made it, and made it in the big old, grand old way *if* he'd only run into some luck. A damn shame he hadn't, a damn shame he'd run into J. D. Cullen forty years too late.

However, by morning light, and in his own new bodiless, pain-free condition, J. D. began to wonder if it really *was* too late. So the kid wanted a screen test, so why the hell not? Of course it would mean that he, Cullen, would have to do a few things that would have been against his better judgment in that other time. Like call up some people. For years, since they'd stopped calling him, J. D. had had enough obdurate pride to refuse to try to get in touch because he wouldn't give them the satisfaction of brushing him off.

Now that all this no longer mattered, he began the day by calling a writer he knew, a man who owed his start in the business clearly and squarely to J. D. Cullen, but one who had gone on to writing and producing teevee shows and had racked up several winners along the line (J. D. had of course never watched any of them).

"Hello? Like to talk to Mac. Tell him it's an old friend."

"May I have your name. I'll see if Mr. McCracken is free."

J. D. gave the girl his name and waited. The secretary finally returned with the news that Mr. McCracken had not arrived yet. J. D. left his number. He called another number and got an answering service and left his own number there too. Altogether he made five calls and either nobody was in or it was said they were not.

Cullen sat on the edge of his bed in his pajamas and tried to decide on a next step. It was as if he'd been presented with half a script and begun shooting, but wouldn't be able to finish until he himself had figured out how the story would come out.

Alternate endings: (a) he could sit around all day waiting for one of them to call him back, but that wouldn't satisfy the dramatic requirement in any sense of the term, for he knew none of them was going to call; (b) he could use the go-for-broke, no-holds-barred, nothing-down, all-stops-out, crash-bang kind of finale for which J. D. Cullen had once had a professional reputation of some worth.

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Right away, of course, J. D. knew which ending it was going to be.

He could have gone out and bought new clothes for Trevis, but the evening before his practiced eye had discovered a now-useful coincidence. The boy was just about his own size. Not J. D.'s present size, for with illness he'd grown thin in the shoulders and thick through his ailing belly, but that had happened only in the last ten years. He still had a closet full of suits from the old days, and he spent the next half hour going through them and deciding what Trevis ought to wear.

He took the clothing into the other room and woke the kid and told him to get ready. Then J. D. himself got dressed up and they got into the Lincoln and set off.

The kid couldn't stop asking questions. "Do I have an appointment? Will they be expecting me? Did you already tell them —?"

"I have everything under control. Don't worry about a thing. Stay cool. When we get there, I'll tell you what to do, step by step."

Finally Trevis settled back and began breathing normally. It took almost an hour of snaking along through traffic and morning smog before they rolled up to a familiar gate, and after a minute a guard strolled out of a building. Cullen with slow deliberation removed his wallet from his jacket to expose a pass. This part of it could have been embarrassing, having the boy find out he couldn't even get entree without showing credentials. But it didn't work that way. "Wow!" Trevis said. "Imagine being able to haul out a pass for a place like this and sail right in."

"We'll drive around a little first," J. D. decided. "Give you a feel of the place. Then I'll make a phone call."

The front lot under the gray-bright morning sky was big and empty, hardly any traffic. J. D. explained that this was where the business end of it went on, what business there was these days, the front-office stuff, and it was pretty dull all around; so they would go on to the backlot, where the action was, if there *was* any action.

But it was about the same story there. A few more people, not many. They got out of the car and walked around, the kid ooo-ing and ah-ing over the usual clutter that dots the landscape of a backlot belonging to a studio that's been in business almost from the beginning of it all. Old cars, parts of a stern-wheeler, a street out of chinatown, the facade of an antebellum mansion, a few native huts from the banks of the Congo, a brokendown oriental wedding-chair half buried in a pile of sand left over from some construction job, the towers of Babylon, the slums of Rio, a

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spruced-up and apparently recently used frontier town with marshal's office, general store, and saloon. Dominating everything were the sound stages, great squarish buildings hunkering here and there like sphinxes.

Cullen opened the door of one. No one challenged them because again no one was around. The place was so big inside that it seemed to have its own atmosphere, which was even grayer than the atmosphere outside. A couple of rods away someone had left a bunch of floods on against a white wall, and the single gem-bright glare in the surrounding gray produced a muted sense of expectancy which remained unfulfilled.

"Gee whiz!" said Trevis Frayne. "Is that where my test is going to be?"

"Maybe," said J. D. "You wait right here a minute. I'll make that other call now."

"Couldn't we go to your office?"

"*My* office? No, I don't have an office here any more. No need. I do my work — all over."

Cullen really did make a call, using the nearest booth. He called a hemi-demi-semi-friend, maybe the only such he had left, who was in casting, and he was all braced to spill the news about this kid Trevis Frayne, who might have something the studio could use and could J. D. bring him around? But a receptionist told him, "I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Kanevsky isn't with the studio any more. He died six months ago. Would you speak with someone else in that department?"

J. D. let the phone smack back onto the hook. He arranged his face into an expression of no-problem before he turned to face Trevis where he was waiting, combing his hair in the chrome on the Lincoln. "Everything okay, Mr. C.?" he asked anxiously.

"So-so, son," The only thing to do was stall around awhile, till he could think of another tack.

"I mean, are we on our way?"

"Yep. My friend is tied up for the moment, but when I gave him the sell on you, he perked up. Said bring you around in an hour. He'll be free then."

"What will we do till the time comes?"

"There's still a thing or two to see yet. We'll drive over to the library. It's my own baby. I thought of it, had the building built, everything." And it was true that once long ago he, J. D. Cullen, had signed a memo directing that a place be constructed and racks be provided to store the old reels that were accumulating everywhere and that a librarian be hired to keep track of things. Even then he'd had the collecting urge, knew someday someone would thank him for his

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foresight. (Actually, no one had.)

He stopped the Lincoln beside the concrete-block structure. Nothing fancy about it, but it was sturdy, which was the whole point. At the entrance another guard loomed up. "I'm sorry, sir, but this is a restricted area. You have to have a special pass."

"Since when is that?" J. D. asked, with more interest than challenge. On the whole it was a good thing, security. There were a lot of valuable reels among the contents of the building, irreplaceable items, and he had preached for years about tightening restrictions.

"Since a long time," said the guard impersonally, trying to shoulder them both back out the way they'd come in.

But then suddenly, unexpectedly, as if Trevis Frayne had all at once decided to adlib the script himself, upstaging J. D. Cullen, the guard reeled backward under the impetus of a shove. "You can't talk like that to him, buddy," Trevis Frayne said in a georgeraft voice. "Do you know who this is you're talking to?"

"Wait!" said J. D.

"Well, *do* you know who this man is?" Trevis demanded as he shoved the surprised guard again.

"Listen, son —"

But it was already too late. Trevis, who was faster and younger, had leaned forward and butted the security man halfway across the room. The interior of the building was one big space, homogeneously furnished. Except for a general index (on cards in a standing cabinet with little drawers) to show what films were there, nothing was in the building but tall rack after tall rack, in rows, like regular library stacks.

The guard had managed to rise above his surprise and was fighting back. No nightstick, no gun, no sap. Maybe he'd left them on the desk when he got up to refuse them admittance, or maybe he wasn't an armed guard like the one out at the main gate. Anyway, this fight was hand-to-hand, fist-to-throat, knee-to-belly, elbow-to-solar plexus.

Trevis got the better of it for the first few minutes, and then the security man, who was all of forty-five and running to middle-flesh, seemed to get a second wind and go after the kid in earnest.

After a few more useless cries, J. D. shut up and just watched, not knowing what else to do. The guard smashed the kid's beautiful face into the green-painted concrete floor and tried to stomp him, but the kid popped back up flailing and got the older man so hard on the jaw that he staggered backward ten paces and was in the stacks. J. D. moved with them, still wondering what to do. Call somebody? Who? If he alerted the main

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security office, they'd only send someone over to arrest Trevis.

In the huge dim room with the ceiling-high racks of reels, the punching and slamming became more fierce, more concentrated. J. D. saw the kid jabbing at the guard's eyes, saw the guard return by stooping to thrust a beefy shoulder into the kid's viscera.

"Don't!" screamed J. D. helplessly as the combatants locked bodies, lost their mutual balance, and crashed like a wrecker's weight squarely against the racks on one side, then righted themselves momentarily, only to crash into those on the other. J. D. saw both sets of racks totter, knew what was going to happen.

Moving in majestic slowmotion (only about fifty-four frames per second, J. D. thought), the racks all across the room began to go down like dominoes. There was just the wrong (or the right?) distance between them, the length of a couple of coffins end to end, so the racks had falling room; and after the reels in their heavy metal canisters dumped out and rained down, the steel racks they'd rested on came too.

And J. D. knew it for what it was, a scene that could go down alongside the most memorable:

the collapse of the Empire State Building
the chariot races, four fiery black horses against four white
the tall craggy man being shot down in his theater box
the burning of Atlanta
Samson pulling down the Philistine temple
the eruption of Vesuvius.

The guard, whose name was Joe Greco, a studio grip until this easier job came along, lucked out. He happened to be at the far end of the row, where for no reason those particular steel racks stood a little closer together and the top of one caught the other about midway as they went down, forming a tepee effect that saved him from getting his skull smashed like a cantaloupe.

He was bruised plenty from the falling cans, but after only a few minutes he came alive again and, groaning, hauled his aching body out from under the mess. Then he remembered the strange ones who'd tried to barge in, but he couldn't even see their bodies under all the cans.

Quickly, because he was not inhumane after all — he'd just been doing his job — and they might still be breathing, he began to dig through the clutter with both hands, tossing cans aside, and when a couple of other people from security came rushing in, and some hangers-on who had heard the

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crash, he hollered to them that there were a couple of people trapped underneath. With everyone helping, they managed to shove the twisted racks aside and got all the way to the bare green floor in less than fifteen minutes, but there was nothing there: Joe decided he must have been mistaken about the place and told the crew to dig up the next row too.

Same thing. Nobody there. Or rather, no bodies.

Everyone looked at Joe Greco then, but Joe had been around the studio a long time and had seen many strange things, which was only to be expected in a strange business. Logic told him they couldn't have gotten away. So they must have gone into the cans, maybe all the way back into the old films they both looked as if they'd come out of in the first place. But the logic of Joe Greco was not necessarily the logic of the rest of the world. So he knew he'd have to improvise.

"Okay," he said, "this is the way it happened —"

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George Martin's latest story concerns a master telepath and an apparently paranoid client who could not stop running, but for a chillingly different reason . . .

The Runners

by GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

There were times, between cases, when Colmer grew strangely restless. He could never quite put his finger on the reason. Most of the time he chalked it up to boredom, but somewhere in the back of his head he knew it was more than that.

Colmer was a man of resources, though. He had his remedies when the moods came upon him. The best thing, he'd found, was just to get back into action. There was always a demand for his services. He was a Master Probe, one of less than a hundred in all of known space. Sometimes, if they couldn't meet his standard fee, he'd take a smaller one. If the case was interesting enough, and he was bored.

Colmer had other pursuits for the times when he couldn't find a case. He would often occupy himself with games and friends and sports and sex. And food, frequently with food. He was a small, quiet chipmunk of a man, and he loved to eat, especially when the moods came upon him and there was nothing else to do. It was all part of the full life, Colmer felt.

He was sitting in the Old Lady, waiting for his dinner in a lull between cases, when Bryl found him.

The Old Lady had been a schooner once. Now it floated off Sullivan's Wharf, in the heart of the fishermans' district of Old Poseidon. Nearby, the sleek silver boats came and went daily, harvesting the wealth of Poseidon's Big Sea. They dragged great nets full of bluespawn and tiny silver winkles. Others packed their holds with salt-rich hunter crabs. And the smaller ships, oddly, brought back the giant spikefins and the vampire eels, whose meat was black and buttery.

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The whole district smelled of fish and salt and sea, and Colmer loved it. Whenever time lay heavy on his hands, he'd take a day off to walk the twisting wood-plank streets. He'd watch the fisherships set out at dawn, then drink till noon in the wharfside bars, then hunt for curios in the mustiest shops he could find. By late afternoon, he'd usually have worked up an appetite. Then he'd head for the Old Lady. There were dozens of seafood places in the district, but the Old Lady was the best.

He'd just finished his appetizer that day when Bryl pulled up a chair and sat down at his table. "I need your help," he said, quickly and simply.

Colmer wanted dinner, not company. He frowned a little. "I have an office," he said.

"You keep records of every client?"

"Of course," said Colmer.

"I don't want any records kept. That's why I hung out around this place. They told me Adrian Colmer always eats at the Old Lady, that I'd find you here if I waited long enough. I didn't know if I could wait long enough. But I got lucky. Please help me."

Colmer was suddenly interested, his curiosity aroused. He studied the stranger across from him. He saw a tall, thin man, a dark face framed by shoulder-length black hair and dominated by a hawk nose, nondescript dress that a thousand men might have worn. But the face was oddly ageless, the man fidgeted a lot, and his eyes moved constantly. That was all Colmer could tell from a glance.

He could have probed, of course. Some Talents would have done that, professional ethics notwithstanding. But Colmer only opened for a fee.

He poured Bryl a glass of wine from the bottle on the table. "All right," he said. "Eat, if you like. And tell me why you want help."

Bryl took the wine, sipped at it. His eyes never stopped moving. "My name is Ted Bryl. I want you to probe me. There are some people after me, you see. They've been hunting me for years. I'm sure they want to kill me, but I don't know why. As far back as I can remember, they've been following me, and I've been running."

Colmer wove his hands together and set his chin upon them. "You sound paranoid," he said. He didn't believe in wasting words.

Bryl laughed. "It sounds like that. But I'm not. I've gone to the police, you know. They've probed me, they know it's real. Sometimes they've even arrested some of the people after me. But then they always let them go. They won't do anything to help me."

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"Very paranoid."

"The police have probed me, I tell you."

Colmer smiled tolerantly. "Police probes," he said. Like a doctor saying 'chiropractor.'

"All right," Bryl said. "Probe me. See for yourself."

"Don't get upset. If you're paranoid, I can probably help you. A Master Probe is a qualified psipsych, among other things. However, you haven't mentioned a fee."

"I can't afford your fee. I don't have much money. I get jobs, but I don't keep them long. I have to run. *They* are never far behind me."

"I see." Colmer studied him a minute. "Well, I've got nothing else going at the moment. I might as well see what your problem is. But if you tell anyone I worked without a fee, I'll deny it. Of course."

"Of course," Bryl agreed.

Colmer probed him.

It was over in less than a minute; a quick opening of Colmer's mind, a drinking, a draining. To an outsider, just a long vacant stare.

Then Colmer sat back and stroked his chin and reached for the wine. "It's real," he said. "How very strange."

Bryl smiled. "That's what the police probes said. But *why? Why* are they after me?"

"You don't know. So I can't know, unless I probe one of them. You have a barrier, by the way."

"A barrier?"

"A mind block. Your memory goes back five years and a few months, then skips to your adolescence. Which was quite a long time ago, by the way. Undoubtedly you've had rejuves. There's a big hole in your head. Someone's shielded you good up there, for some reason."

Bryl suddenly looked afraid. "I know," he said. "I think *they* did it. I must know something, something important. So they took away my memory. But they're afraid I'll get it back. So they want to kill me. That's it, isn't it?"

"No," said Colmer. "It can't be that simple. If they were just criminals, the police wouldn't keep letting them go. That happens over and over again, remember. On Newholme, on Baldur, on Silversky. You've really been around. I envy you your travels." He smiled.

Bryl did not smile. "My running, you mean. I don't think you'd envy it if you had to live it. Look, Colmer, I live in constant fear. Every time I look over a shoulder, I wonder if they'll be behind me. Sometimes they are."

"Agreed, I saw those moments. The time the fat girl was sitting in your apartment when you entered. The man waiting at the spaceport,

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when you returned from that stint on the orbital docks. The blonde following you through the carnival. Very vivid memories. Very chilling."

Bryl was staring at him, shock written on his face. "God! How can you talk like that? You're a cold fish, Colmer."

"I have to be. I'm a Probe."

"What else can you tell me?"

"The three of them are working together. But you know that, don't you? The blonde is a telepath. That's how she follows you. The man is her protection. The fat girl — I don't know. She's very strange. She smiles like an idiot. I don't understand her function. But she seems to terrify you."

Bryl shivered. "Yes. You'd understand if you'd seen her. She's gross. Huge and white, like a fat maggot. And always smiling, dammit, always smiling at me. I never know where she's going to turn up. That time on Newholme, when I opened the door and she was sitting there, smiling at me — it was like — like finding a cockroach in a bowl of cereal you've half eaten. God!"

"You're convinced that she's going to kill you," Colmer said. "I don't know why. If any killing was to be done, the man is the logical one to do it. He's bigger, looks very strong. You've seen the gun he carries."

Bryl nodded. "I know. But it won't be him. She'll do it. I *know* it. That's why she's always smiling."

"You could buy a gun and kill them, you know," Colmer said.

Bryl looked at him. "I — I never thought of that."

"True. Yet it's odd that you haven't. Don't you think?"

"Yes. But, somehow, I couldn't do that. I'm not a violent man."

"You're a very violent man," Colmer said. "But I agree. You will not use force against them, for some reason even you don't know."

Bryl fidgeted. "Can you help me? Before they find me?"

"Perhaps I can help you. However, they've already found you. The blonde just entered the restaurant. They're giving her a table."

Bryl gasped and whirled about in his seat. Across the width of the bare plank floor, the maitre d' was escorting a shapely fair-haired young women to a seat. Bryl looked at her, his mouth hanging open. "God," he said. "They won't leave me alone." Then suddenly he was on his feet, running, literally *running*, from the Old Lady. The blonde never even looked at him.

Colmer watched him go, then glanced out the porthole. Bryl would be even more terrified when he reached the wharf. Down aways, an immense fat girl with an idiot

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grin was sitting on the edge of the pier, watching the fisherships spill their catch.

"Very dramatic," Colmer said. His meal arrived just then, a plate of fat bluespawn cooked in cheese. But he stood up. "I'll be joining that young lady," he told the waiter, pointing. "Bring it over there."

He walked across the restaurant and sat down. The waiter followed and put the fish in front of him.

The blonde looked up. "Adrian Colmer," she said. "I've heard of you."

Colmer *tsk*-ed. "Probing without permission. Very unprofessional, young lady. But I'll forgive you. I'm sure you didn't get much. My defenses are very good."

She smiled. "True. I suppose it was inevitable that he'd go to a private Probe eventually. How much do you know?"

"Everything he knows. Enough to have you arrested, unless you explain things to me."

"He's had us arrested from time to time. The police always let us go. But go ahead, probe. It's all right."

"You won't resist?"

"No. I'm honored."

Colmer probed.

He didn't go very deep. After all, she was a Talent. Just a quick skim, but it was enough. Afterward, he sat back, blinking rapidly in confusion. "Curiouser and curiouser. He *hired* you?"

"He doesn't remember it, of course. Part of the deal. But we have all the papers. Enough documentation to convince the police whenever they haul us in. They can't tell him. That's in the papers too. It would break the barrier, and there'd be a lawsuit you wouldn't believe."

"Edward Bryllanti," Colmer mused. "Yes, the name rings a bell. Very wealthy. He could do it. But why would he *want* to? A life of constant fear, constant running...."

"It's his idea," the woman said. "He even picked Freda. She's a moron, of course. A brain-wipe. We have to lead her around by the hand, put her where he can see her. But something about her terrifies him. So he wanted her in on it. To keep him running."

Colmer began eating his dinner. He chewed it slowly, thoughtfully. "I don't understand," he finally admitted, between bites.

The woman smiled. "You didn't go deep enough. I understand. Didn't you find it? Tell me, haven't you ever had moments when you wondered whether it was all worthwhile? When it suddenly hit you that it was all meaningless, all empty?"

Colmer stared, chewing.

"Bryllanti had more of those than most. He had psipsychs in, saw Probes. Got him nowhere.

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Finally he did this. Now he doesn't wonder any more. He lives every day to the fullest, because he thinks it might be his last. He's got constant excitement, constant fear, and he never has time to think whether life is worth living. He's too busy just staying alive. You see?"

Colmer stared on, suddenly feeling very cold. The fish in his mouth tasted like damp sawdust.

"But he *runs*," he said finally. "His life *is* empty. Just running, meaningless running, on a treadmill of his own creation."

The woman sighed. "You disappoint me. I expected more insight from a Master Probe. Don't you see? We *all* run."

After that, Colmer lowered his fees, to get himself more cases. But still the moods come often.

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THE WRONG TURNING

The other day it was necessary for me, in the course of an article I was writing, to determine how rapidly the innermost edge of Saturn's ring revolved about Saturn.

Since I am a reasonably lazy person, my first thought was to look it up, and I began to go through my reference library. When the first few reference books, ones on which I had counted quite confidently, failed me, I grew annoyed and went through everything. Nothing helped. In many different places I found what the period of revolution of ring particles in Cassini's division would be if there were any there, but nowhere did I find the period of the innermost edge.

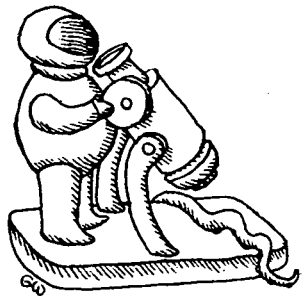
I was baffled and for a moment I thought I might revise my article in such a way as no longer to need that piece of information, but that seemed cowardly. I decided to look over the list of Saturn's satellites, their distances and their period of revolution and see if I could work out something that would help me with the rings.

I got to work, and in five minutes I had re-discovered Kepler's Third Law.

This plunged me into an

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embarrassed despair, for you must understand that the prime prerequisite for re-discovering Kepler's Third Law is forgetting it first, and for me to forget it requires a brain of no ordinary stupidity since I had actually written articles dealing with Kepler's Third Law.*

For a while I was too upset to continue working, but what is the use in being intelligent if you can't think up a good specious argument to prove the existence of that intelligence against the clearest evidence to the contrary**. I argued this way: An unintelligent fellow wouldn't know that Kepler's Third Law existed. An intelligent fellow would know that Kepler's Third Law existed and would remember it. A super-intelligent fellow (ah ha!) would know that Kepler's Third Law existed but could freely forget it because he could always re-discover it.

This bit of nonsense so heartened me that I not only calculated the period of revolution of the innermost edge of Saturn's rings and went back to work, but I even began to consider how I could use the knowledge to write a different article for F&SF and my Gentle Readers. And here it is —

Nobody was around to witness the Solar system forming, but a very reasonable conjecture is that it was originally a cloud of dust and gas which gradually coalesced under the influence of its overall gravitational field. The gravitational field strengthened steadily as the material condensed, thus hastening further condensation.

Presumably, the condensation produced our present Sun, but it isn't likely that it did so in one smooth process. There must have been sub-condensations formed so that there was a stage during the formation of the Solar system when there were innumerable chunks of icy or rocky material formed — colliding, gouging, breaking up, re-coalescing and so on — and most of it gradually ending up in the central body.

It is also reasonable to suppose that as the original cloud of dust and gas coalesced into the centrally situated Sun, which is much less voluminous than the original cloud, the rate of rotation sped up. The reason for that is that the angular momentum of a closed system must be conserved. The angular momentum depends not only on the rate of rotation, but on the distance of the turning object from the center. If that average distance decreases with condensation, the rate of rotation must increase to make up for it.

**See HARMONY IN HEAVEN (F & SF, February 1965)*

***See THINKING ABOUT THINKING (F & SF, January 1975)*

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As the coalescing Sun turns faster and faster, the centrifugal effect that tends to throw things outward from the center grows more marked, particularly where the rate of turn is greatest — at the equatorial region of the coalescing body. As the Sun progresses towards its formation, it becomes an ellipsoid, with matter jutting far out from the equatorial regions in the form of a thinning sheet.*

The matter within this equatorial sheet can coalesce to form conglomerations of matter smaller than the central body, conglomerations that will continue to move about the Sun, caught in the grip of that body's strong gravitational field, and themselves separated by great enough distances from the Sun and from each other to be safe from collisions or near-collisions that would alter their orbits drastically.

And thus we end with planets circling the Sun.

If this is indeed the way in which planets are formed, then we see that they must possess certain properties. For instance, they are formed out of that small fraction of the original cloud that represents the equatorial bulge, so planets must be much smaller than the central Sun.

Then, too, the original cloud, including the equatorial bulge, was all turning in one piece, so to speak, so that you would expect the planets to be revolving about the Sun in the same direction that the Sun is rotating about its axis ("direct motion"). Furthermore, the plane of the planetary orbit should be in the plane of the Sun's equator (the "inclination" should be equal to zero), and the planet should be moving in a more or less circular orbit (the "eccentricity" should be equal to zero).

All this is true of the planets. All together, they have a mass about 1/750 of the Sun. They each revolve about the Sun in the same direction that the Sun rotates about its axis. They all move in orbits that are nearly circular, and the planet of all the orbits are quite close to that of the Solar equator.

The fact that all these things are true can't be coincidence. If the planets were formed with no reference to the sun at all, they could revolve about the Sun in any plane and with any degree of eccentricity. There is no compelling reason in celestial mechanics why they should not. Comets circle the Sun in any plane and with any eccentricity.

Yet the fact is that each planet moves in direct fashion and with very

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**Most of the angular momentum of the Solar system ended up in the material formed out of that thinning sheet, which bothered astronomers for a long time. That is something I may deal with in another article some day.*

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low eccentricity and inclination. This means that some kind of constraint is involved, something that prevents planets from having high eccentricities and inclinations. It is precisely through an attempt to imagine what the constraint might be that astronomers have thought up this notion of a condensing cloud with an equatorial bulge. It explains the planetary design of the Solar system.

As for the comets, they are the remnants of the original dust cloud that formed the Sun and the planets, remnants so far out that they didn't participate in the condensation. There were sub-condensations into small, icy comets that are now distributed about the Sun in a large hollow sphere, and they are not subjected to the usual planetary constraints for that reason.

The fact that the planets have orbits that are not *exactly* circular and are not *exactly* in the Sun's equatorial plane is not too surprising. They were formed by the slow ingathering of chunks of matter. In general, those chunks arrive from every direction so that the jarring effect cancelled out. The last few big ones might, through sheer chance, have been asymmetrically distributed and the nearly fully-formed planet may have been given a final knock or knocks that upset its perfect zeroes somewhat.

Naturally, the smaller the planet, the more those last few collisions would have affected it, and it is not surprising that the largest eccentricities and inclinations are found in the smallest planets, Pluto, Mars, Mercury.

If this is truly the way in which the planets of the Solar system have formed, then there might be some marks of those last collisions. Where atmospheres are involved, erosion might wipe them away, and might in any case hide them from our eye. Where the atmosphere is thin, or virtually absent, the last marks are preserved and visible in the form of collision craters. One hemisphere of Mars is rich in them, and Mercury is finely stippled all over with craters.

What applies to the planets should also apply to the satellites. The forming planet should itself have an equatorial bulge, and still smaller bodies should form in the equatorial plane, revolving in direct fashion with nearly zero eccentricity.

Consider Jupiter, for instance. Jupiter has five satellites, all of which revolve in nearly circular orbits in direct fashion in very nearly the planet's equatorial plane. This can't be coincidence; the constraints are there.

In addition to these five satellites, however, there are eight other satellites that do not obey the rules. (The eighth was discovered as recently

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as September 14, 1974.) What of these eight? Do they destroy the entire theory?

No, they don't. These outer eight are very small compared to the others and very distant from the planet. Even the largest of the outer eight is smaller than the smallest of the inner five. The nearest of the outer eight is over six times as far from Jupiter as the farthest of the inner five. The outer eight are therefore related to Jupiter rather as the comets are related to the Sun; they are not part of the general condensation-equatorial-plane beginning. They are considered to be captured asteroids and as such don't have the usual constraints but can orbit with large eccentricities and inclinations.

The eccentricities of the outer eight range from a moderate 0.08 (quite small enough to be respectable) to a large 0.38. (The maximum eccentricity is 1.0.) The inclinations vary from 28° to 163° (180° is the maximum). Any inclination between 90° and 180° indicates that the satellite is revolving in the wrong direction and is moving in "retrograde" fashion. Four of Jupiter's outer eight satellites, the four outermost in fact, have retrograde orbits.

The fact that the four outermost have retrograde orbits is a point in favor of the captured asteroid theory, since it can be shown that the capture of an asteroid into a retrograde orbit is easier than its capture into a direct orbit.

In addition to the outer eight Jovian satellites, the outermost satellite of Saturn and the outer satellite of Neptune seem to have the characteristics of captured asteroids. The outermost satellite of Saturn is about 3.6 times as far from Saturn as is the next farthest satellite; it has an eccentricity of 0.16 and moves in a retrograde orbit. The average distance of the outer satellite of Neptune is nearly 16 times that of the inner;it has an inclination of 27.7° (not enough to make it retrograde, but quite high) and an eccentricity of 0.75, higher than that of any other object in the Solar system except for comets.

Astronomers feel quite safe, therefore, in supposing that these ten satellites were not formed out of the same condensing cloud that formed the central planet they circle. That still leaves 23 "true satellites" that may have been so formed. Listing them by planets going out from the Sun, and satellites going out from the planet, the 23 are:

Earth (1) — Moon

Mars (2) — Phobos, Deimos

Jupiter (5) — Amalthea, Io, Europa, Ganymede, Callisto

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Saturn (9) — Janus, Mimas, Enceladus, Tethys, Dione, Rhea, Titan, Hyperion, Iapetus. (And also the rings, of course.)

Uranus (5) — Miranda, Umbriel, Ariel, Titania, Oberon

Neptune (1) — Triton.

Let's consider how these 23 satellites fit the "condensing cloud with the equatorial bulge" hypothesis as far as their orbital characteristics are concerned. We can start by considering the distance of the various satellites from their primary — but not in miles or kilometers. After all, a large planet forms out of a large coalescing cloud with a large equatorial bulge and would therefore be expected to have satellites farther from itself than a small one would. Therefore, let's measure satellite distance as multiples of the radius of the primary (the planet it circles).

Table 1 — Satellite Distance

Satellite	Distance (primary-radii)
Rings (inner edge)	1.24
Rings (outer edge)	2.28
Amalthea	2.54
Janus	2.64
Phobos	2.71
Mimas	3.10
Enceladus	3.99
Tethys	4.94
Miranda	5.44
Io	5.91
Dione	6.32
Deimos	6.95
Ariel	8.41
Rhea	8.83
Europa	9.40
Umbriel	11.7
Triton	13.4
Ganymede	15.0
Titania	19.9
Titan	20.5
Hyperion	24.8
Oberon	25.7
Callisto	26.4
Iapetus	59.6
Moon	60.3

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One thing we can point out at once is that of the ten satellites considered to be captured satellites, the one with the smallest distance in terms of primary-radii is Nereid, whose average distance from Neptune is equal to 130 Neptune-radii, a value more than twice as high as the largest value for any satellite listed in Table 1. The distance values for the other nine range up to 332 for the outermost of Jupiter's satellites. In terms of distance alone, then, we seem justified in omitting these ten.

Let's try listing the planets by some logical method other than sheer distance. As a planet increases in radius, it also increases in mass even more rapidly (barring an enormous drop in density). It may be that mass is more important than mere radius, since it is mass that is the source of the planet's gravitational field, and it is the strength of the gravitational grip that keeps the bulge in line and produces satellites that do not deviate much, if at all, from the equatorial plane and from orbit-circularity. After all, two satellites may each be at a distance of five times the radius of its primary, but the more massive planet will exert the greater gravitational effect at that distance.

The most marked effect of the planetary gravitational field involves the speed at which a satellite moves in its orbit. Therefore, let us list the satellites again, this time in the order of orbital speed and see if that makes any marked difference in the distance-characteristic. This is done in Table 2.

Table 2 — Satellite Orbital Speed

Satellite	Orbital speed (kilometers/second)
Amalthea	13.15
Rings (inner edge)	10.74
Io	8.66
Rings (outer edge)	8.37
Janus	7.75
Mimas	7.16
Europa	6.84
Enceladus	6.33
Tethys	5.66
Ganymede	5.44
Dione	4.98
Rhea	4.23
Callisto	4.10

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Miranda	3.19
Titan	2.78
Ariel	2.75
Hyperion	2.53
Umbriel	2.34
Triton	2.20
Titania	1.89
Iapetus	1.64
Oberon	1.59
Phobos	1.04
Deimos	0.68
Moon	0.51

As you see, the chief difference between Table 1 and 2 is that the satellites of massive Jupiter move further toward the head of the list while those of small Mars drop toward the bottom. In Table 1, Iapetus and the Moon are so much farther away then the others that we might have doubted their status, but in Table 2, the spread evens out, although the Moon is still at the bottom of the list.

Next, let's consider the eccentricity of each satellite (its departure from orbital circularity) and the inclination of the orbit to the equatorial plane of its primary. If the theory of satellite formation from the equatorial bulge of the coalescing planet is correct, then both values should be, ideally, zero. The actual values, given to two decimal places in the case of eccentricity, and one in the case of inclination, are given in Table 3 (with the satellites listed in the order given in Table 2).

Actually, as you can see, most of the satellites come quite close to the ideal; close enough to make it quite certain that it couldn't happen by coincidence in so many cases. Only the equatorial bulge (or something equally good that no astronomer has yet happened to think of) could account for it.

Table 3 — Satellite Eccentricity and Inclination

Satellite	Eccentricity	Inclination (°)
Amalthea	0.00	0.1
Rings (inner)	0.00	0.0
Io	0.00	0.1
Rings (outer)	0.00	0.0
Janus	0.00	0.0

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Mimas	0.02	1.5
Europa	0.00	0.1
Enceladus	0.00	0.0
Tethys	0.00	1.1
Ganymede	0.00	0.3
Dione	0.00	0.0
Rhea	0.00	0.3
Callisto	0.01	0.2
Miranda	0.00	0.0
Titan	0.03	0.3
Ariel	0.01	0.0
Hyperion	0.10	0.6
Umbriel	0.01	0.0
Triton	0.00	27.7
Titania	0.02	0.0
Iapetus	0.03	14.7
Oberon	0.01	0.0
Phobos	0.02	1.1
Deimos	0.00	1.8
Moon	0.06	23.5

As a matter of fact, the satellites fit the hypothesis even better than the planets do.

The nine planets have, in some cases, moderately high orbital eccentricities. That of Pluto is 0.25 and of Mercury 0.21. The average eccentricity for the nine planets is 0.08. That is not high, but the average eccentricity for the twenty-five satellites (and rings) listed in Table 3 is only 0.016. The satellite with the most lopsided orbit is Hyperion, which has an eccentricity of 0.10 and an orbit only slightly more eccentric than that of Mars (0.093), and has nothing like the eccentricity of Mercury and Pluto.

Inclination is not quite so clear cut. The inclinations of the planetary orbits can deviate by several degrees from the ideal. Earth's orbit is incline 7° to the Sun's equatorial plane, and if Earth's orbit is taken as the standard, the inclinations of the other planets deviate by a few degrees, the figure being highest for Pluto, which has an inclination to Earth's orbit of 17°.

In comparison with this, 22 of the objects listed in Table 3 have inclinations to the equatorial plane of their primary of less than two degrees and ten of them have an inclination of less than a tenth of a

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degree. There is no way of getting round that without calling on the equatorial bulge theory.

And yet some satellites do represent a puzzle. Let us concentrate on those satellites which have an eccentricity of higher than 0.08 (the planetary average) or an inclination of greater than 2°, or both. These are listed in Table 4, and there are only four of them.

Table 4 — The Odd Satellites

Satellite	Eccentricity	Inclination (°)
Hyperion	0.10	0.6
Triton	0.00	27.7
Iapetus	0.03	14.7
Moon	0.06	23.5

Hyperion is not very impressive in its irregularity, as I have already said. Its eccentricity is only marginally high and its inclination is quite satisfactorily low. We can let it go.

The Moon is a special case, which I discussed in an earlier article (JUST MOONING AROUND, May, 1963), and I won't linger on the matter here. It may be, after all, a captured body, which would account for its high inclination and its marginally high eccentricity. Then, too, Earth and Moon affect each other tidally to an unprecedented amount since the two bodies are far more nearly equal in size than is any other satellite-primary combination in the Solar system (or any planet-sun combination either). The tidal effects may have modified whatever the original orbit may have been and produced the present odd situation.

As for Iapetus, that is a rather unusual satellite. When it is to the west of Saturn, it is six times as bright as when it is to the east of Saturn. If it turns only one face to Saturn, as the Moon does to Earth (something that seems a reasonable assumption) then we are seeing one hemisphere when it is to the west and the other hemisphere to the east.)

There must therefore be a profound asymmetry to the satellite (which is of moderate size — perhaps 1750 kilometers in diameter, half that of the Moon.) Furthermore, it must be that the asymmetry is distributed in such a way that the hemisphere we see when Iapetus is on one side of Saturn is quite different from the other; that we see each different hemisphere head-on, or nearly so.

Whatever the asymmetry is, it must be something that is capable of making one hemisphere icy and reflective and the other rocky and non-reflective. Perhaps the asymmetry is the result of an unusually severe final blow in the coalescence of the satellite so that Iapetus is a kind of

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double world, the lesser half forming a large lump on the larger, with one of the two icy and the other rocky. And it may be this final blow that knocked Iapetus well out of the equatorial plane. (I have not seen this notion advanced anywhere, so if it is a poor theory the blame is mine.)

That leaves us with Triton, which is more highly inclined than are either the Moon or Iapetus, but which has a virtually circular orbit as opposed to the marginal eccentricities of the other two. This combination of high inclination (the highest for any satellite that is not clearly a captured one) and very low eccentricity is a curious one, and so let's look at Triton a little more closely.

Triton was discovered in 1846, only a month after Neptune itself was discovered, and small wonder, for it is one of the large satellites. It has a diameter of 3,700 kilometers, a trifle larger than the Moon, and anyone looking at Neptune with a good telescope would see Triton without much trouble.

When Triton was first discovered, it was observed to be revolving in the retrograde direction. It was assumed that this was because Neptune itself was rotating on its axis in a retrograde direction.

You see, if the condensing-cloud-with-equatorial-bulge theory is right, then, ideally, every planet ought to rotate in the direct fashion, with its axis at right angles to its plane of revolution. However, for some reason, planetary rotation tends to deviate quite a bit from the ideal. The axis of Jupiter, to be sure, tips only 3.1° from this perpendicular ideal, but in the case of Mars and Saturn the axial tipping is 25.2° and 26.7° respectively, and that of Uranus is 98.0°.

Yet the satellite system tips with it. The satellites of Mars and Saturn remain in the equatorial plane of their primary, and so do the satellites of Uranus. Uranus seems to be rotating on its side, so to speak, so that when it is properly oriented in its orbit it seems to have an east pole and a west pole relative to ourselves. The Uranian satllites go along with this and seem to revolve in an up-down direction relative to ourselves whereas all others seem to revolve in a right-left direction more or less.

Whatever it was that tipped the planet, the effect must have taken place while the planetary cloud was still coalescing, so that the equatorial bulge tipped with it.

It seemed then that Neptune's cloud had tipped extremely — over 150° — so that it was standing virtually on its head, and therefore rotating in the wrong direction, with Triton faithfully following that wrong direction. (Venus stands on its head, but it has no satellite so we can't have a closer example of a satellite standing on its head along with its primary.)

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But then, in 1928, Neptune was studied carefully by means of a spectroscope, which would show which side of it was coming forward toward Earth and which side was receding — and it turned out that Neptune was rotating about its axis in direct fashion. Its axial tilt was only 29°.

This meant Triton was making a wrong turn without excuse. It was standing on its head by itself. Its inclination was not 27.7° at all but 152.3° to account for its retrograde revolution.

Triton's inclination is roughly that of the four outermost satellites of Jupiter; and of Phoebe, the outermost satellite of Saturn. Those five outer satellites of the two giant planets are, however, generally agreed upon as captured satellites. Does that mean Triton is a captured satellite as well?

But if Triton is a captured satellite, how is it possible that by some absolutely unbelievable coincidence, it just happened to settle down into an almost perfectly circular orbit? None of the ten captured satellites have orbits that are even near to circular. The ten captured satellites have an average orbital eccentricity of 0.25 and the least eccentric of the ten has an eccentricity of 0.08. Can Triton be reasonably expected to have an eccentricity of 0.00 if it is a captured satellite?

Yet if Triton was formed in the equatorial bulge so as to have a virtually zero eccentricity, how is it possible for it to be making the wrong turning — moving against the current, so to speak, of the materials forming Neptune?

Triton, it would seem, is the most puzzling of the satellites; more puzzling than the Moon, even.



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Department of fictional authors No. 3: from Kilgore Trout to Jonathan Swift Somers III and now Harry "Bunny" Manders, about whom, see below, writing about the strange and sinister case of some monstrous jewels.

The Problem of The Sore Bridge — Among Others

by HARRY MANDERS

(EDITOR'S PREFACE): Harry "Bunny" Manders was an English writer whose other profession was that of gentleman burglar, circa 1890-1900. Manders' adored senior partner and mentor, Arthur J. Raffles, was a cricket player rated on a par with Lord Peter Wimsey or W. G. Grace. Privately, he was a second-story man, a cracksman, a quick-change artist and confidence man whose only peer was Arsène Lupin. Manders' narratives have appeared in four volumes titled (in America) *The Amateur Cracksman, Raffles, A Thief in the Night,* and *Mr. Justice Raffles.* "Raffles" has become incorporated in the English language (and a number of others) as a term for a gentleman burglar or dashing upper-crust Jimmy Valentine. Mystery story aficionados, of course, are thoroughly acquainted with the incomparable, though tragically flawed, Raffles and his sidekick Manders.

After Raffles' death in the Boer War, Harry Manders gave up crime and became a respectable journalist and author. He married, had children, and died in 1924. His earliest works were agented by E. W. Hornung, Arthur Conan Doyle's brother-in-law. A number of Manders' posthumous works have been agented by Barry Perowne. One of his tales, however, was forbidden by his will to be printed until fifty years after his death. The stipulated time has passed, and now the public may learn how the world was saved without knowing that it was in the gravest peril. It will also discover that the paths of the great Raffles and the great Holmes did cross at least once.

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I.

The Boer bullet that pierced my thigh in 1900 lamed me for the rest of my life, but I was quite able to cope with its effects. However, at the age of sixty-one, I suddenly find that a killer that has felled far more men than bullets has lodged within me. The doctor, my kinsman, gives me six months at the most, six months which he frankly says will be very painful. He knows of my crimes, of course, and it may be that he thinks that my suffering will be poetic justice. I'm not sure. But I'll swear that this is the meaning of the slight smile which accompanied his declaration of my doom.

Be that as it may, I have little time left. But I have determined to write down that adventure of which Raffles and I once swore we would never breathe a word. It happened; it really happened. But the world would not have believed it then. It would have been convinced that I was a liar or insane.

I am writing this, nevertheless, because fifty years from now the world may have progressed to the stage where such things as I tell of are credible. Man may even have landed on the moon by then, if he has perfected a propeller which works in the ether as well as in the air. Or if he discovers the same sort of drive that brought...well, I anticipate.

I must hope that the world of 1974 will believe this adventure. Then the world will know that, whatever crimes Raffles and I committed, we paid for them a thousandfold by what we did that week in the May of 1895. And, in fact, the world is and always will be immeasurably in our debt. Yes, my dear doctor, my scornful kinsman, who hopes that I will suffer pain as punishment, I long ago paid off my debt. I only wish that you could be alive to read these words. And, who knows, you may live to be a hundred and may read this account of what you owe me. I hope so.

II.

I was nodding in my chair in my room at Mount Street when the clanging of the lift gates in the yard startled me. A moment later, a familiar tattoo sounded on my door. I opened it to find, as I expected, A. J. Raffles himself. He slipped in, his bright blue eyes merry, and he removed his Sullivan from his lips to point with it at my whisky and soda.

"Bored, Bunny?"

"Rather," I replied. "It's been almost a year since we stirred our stumps. The voyage around the world after the Levy affair was stimulating. But that ended four months ago. And since then..."

"Ennui and bile!" Raffles cried. "Well, Bunny, that's all over! Tonight we make the blood run hot

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and cold and burn up all green biliousness!"

"And the swag?" I said.

"Jewels, Bunny! To be exact, star sapphires, or blue corundum, cut *en cabochon.* That is, round with a flat underside. And large, Bunny, vulgarly large, almost the size of a hen's egg, if my informant was not exaggerating. There's a mystery about them, Bunny, a mystery my fence has been whispering with his Cockney speech into my ear for some time. They're dispensed by a Mr. James Phillimore of Kensal Rise. But where he gets them, from whom he lifts them, no one knows. My fence has hinted that they may not come from manorial strongboxes or milady's throat but are smuggled from Southeast Asia or South Africa or Brazil, directly from the mine. In any event, we are going to do some reconnoitering tonight, and if the opportunity should arise..."

"Come now, A. J.," I said bitterly. "You *have* done all the needed reconnoitering. Be honest! Tonight we suddenly find that the moment is propitious, and we strike? Right?"

I had always been somewhat piqued that Raffles chose to do all the preliminary work, the casing, as the underworld says, himself. For some reason, he did not trust me to scout the layout.

Raffles blew a huge and perfect smoke ring from his Sullivan, and he clapped me on the shoulder. "You see through me, Bunny! Yes, I've examined the grounds and checked out Mr. Phillimore's schedule."

I was unable to say anything to the most masterful man I have ever met. I meekly donned dark clothes, downed the rest of the whisky, and left with Raffles. We strolled for some distance, making sure that no policemen were shadowing us, though we had no reason to believe they would be. We then took the last train to Willesden at 11:21. On the way I said, "Does Phillimore live near old Baird's house?"

I was referring to the money lender killed by Jack Rutter, the details of which case are written in *Wilful Murder.*

"As a matter of fact," Raffles said, watching me with his keen steel-grey eyes, "it's the *same* house. Phillimore took it when Baird's estate was finally settled and it became available to renters. It's a curious coincidence, Bunny, but then all coincidences are curious. To man, that is. Nature is indifferent."

(Yes, I know I stated before that his eyes were blue. And so they were. I've been criticized for saying in one story that his eyes were blue and in another that they were grey. But he has, as any idiot should have

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guessed, grey-blue eyes which are one color in one light and another in another.)

"That was in January, 1895," Raffles said. "We are in deep waters, Bunny. My investigations have unearthed no evidence that Mr. Phillimore existed before November, 1894. Until he took the lodgings in the East End, no one seems to have heard of or even seen him. He came out of nowhere, rented his third-story lodgings — a terrible place, Bunny — until January. Then he rented the house where bad old Baird gave up the ghost. Since then he's been living a quiet-enough life, excepting the visits he makes once a month to several East End fences. He has a cook and a housekeeper, but these do not live in with him."

At this late hour, the train went no farther than Willesden Junction. We walked from there toward Kensal Rise. Once more, I was dependent on Raffles to lead me through unfamiliar country. However, this time the moon was up, and the country was not quite as open as it had been the last time I was here. A number of cottages and small villas, some only partially built, occupied the empty fields I had passed through that fateful night. We walked down a footpath between a woods and a field, and we came out on the tarred woodblock road that had been laid only four years before. It now had the curb that had been lacking then, but there was still only one pale lamppost across the road from the house.

Before us rose the corner of a high wall with the moonlight shining on the broken glass on top of the wall. It also outlined the sharp spikes on top of the tall green gate. We slipped on our masks. As before, Raffles reached up and placed champagne corks on the spikes. He then put his covert-coat over the corks. We slipped over quietly, Raffles removed the corks, and we stood by the wall in a bed of laurels. I admit I felt apprehensive, even more so than the last time. Old Baird's ghost seemed to hover about the place. The shadows were thicker than they should have been.

I started toward the gravel path leading to the house, which was unlit. Raffles seized my coattails. "Quiet!" he said. "I see somebody — something, anyway — in the bushes at the far end of the garden. Down there, at the angle of the wall."

I could see nothing, but I trusted Raffles, whose eyesight was as keen as a Red Indian's. We moved slowly alongside the wall, stopping frequently to peer into the darkness of the bushes at the angle of the wall. About twenty yards from it, I saw something shapeless move in the shrubbery. I was all for

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clearing out then, but Raffles fiercely whispered that we could not permit a competitor to scare us away. After a quick conference, we moved in very slowly but surely, slightly more solid shadows in the shadow of the wall. And in a few very long and perspiration-drenched minutes, the stranger fell with one blow from Raffles' fist upon his jaw.

Raffles dragged the snoring man out from the bushes so we could get a look at him by moonlight. "What have we here, Bunny?" he said. "Those long curly locks, that high arching nose, the overly thick eyebrows, and the odor of expensive Parisian perfume? Don't you recognize him?"

I had to confess that I did not.

"What, that is the famous journalist and infamous duelist, Isadora Persano!" he said. "Now tell me you have never heard of him, or her, as the case may be?"

"Of course!" I said. "The reporter for the *Daily Telegraph!*"

"No more," Raffles said. "He's a free-lancer now. But what the devil is he doing here?"

"Do you suppose," I said slowly, "that he, too, is one thing by day and quite another at night?"

"Perhaps," Raffles said. "But he may be here in his capacity of journalist. He's also heard things about Mr. James Phillimore. The devil take it! If the press is here, you may be sure that the Yard is not far behind!"

Mr. Persano's features curiously combined a rugged masculinity with an offensive effeminacy. Yet the latter characteristic was not really his fault. His father, an Italian diplomat, had died before he was born. His English mother had longed for a girl, been bitterly disappointed when her only-born was a boy, and, unhindered by a husband or conscience, had named him Isadora and raised him as a girl. Until he entered a public school, he wore dresses. In school, his long hair and certain feminine actions made him the object of an especially vicious persecution by the boys. It was there that he developed his abilities to defend himself with his fists. When he became an adult, he lived on the continent for several years. During this time, he earned a reputation as a dangerous man to insult. It was said that he had wounded half a dozen men with sword or pistol.

From the little bag in which he carried the tools of the trade, Raffles brought a length of rope and a gag. After tying and gagging Persano, Raffles went through his pockets. The only object that aroused his curiosity was a very large matchbox in an inner pocket of his cloak. Opening this, he brought out something that shone in the moonlight.

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"By all that's holy!" he said. "It's one of the sapphires!"

"Is Persano a rich man?" I said.

"He doesn't have to work for a living, Bunny. And since he hasn't been in the house yet, I assume he got this from a fence. I also assume that he put the sapphire in the matchbox because a pickpocket isn't likely to steal a box of matches. As it was, *I* was about to ignore it!"

"Let's get out of here," I said. But he crouched staring down at the journalist with an occasional glance at the jewel. This, by the way, was only about a quarter of the size of a hen's egg. Presently, Persano stirred, and he moaned under the gag. Raffles whispered into his ear, and he nodded. Raffles, saying to me, "Cosh him if he looks like he's going to tell," undid the gag.

Persano, as requested, kept his voice low. He confessed that he had heard rumors from his underworld contacts about the precious stones. Having tracked down our fence, he had contrived easily enough to buy one of Mr. Phillimore's jewels. In fact, he said, it was the first one that Mr. Phillimore had brought in to fence. Curious, wondering where the stones came from, since there were no reported thefts of these, he had come here to spy on Phillimore.

"There's a great story here," he said. "But just what, I haven't the foggiest. However, I must warn you that..."

His warning was not heeded. Both Raffles and I heard the low voices outside the gate and the scraping of shoes against gravel.

"Don't leave me tied up here, boys," Persano said. "I might have a little trouble explaining satisfactorily just what I'm doing here. And then there's the jewel..."

Raffles slipped the stone back into the matchbox and put it into Persano's pocket. If we were to be caught, we would not have the gem on us. He untied the journalist's wrists and ankles and said, "Good Luck!"

A moment later, after throwing our coats over the broken glass, Raffles and I went over the rear rail. We ran crouching into a dense woods about twenty yards back of the house. At the other side at some distance was a newly built house and a newly laid road. A moment later, we saw Persano come over the wall. He ran by, not seeing us, and disappeared down the road, trailing a heavy cloud of perfume.

"We must visit him at his quarters," said Raffles. He put his hand on my shoulder to warn me, but there was no need. I too had seen the three men come around the corner of the wall. One took a position at the angle of the wall; the other two started toward our

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woods. We retreated as quietly as possible. Since there was no train available at this late hour, we walked to Maida Vale and took a hansom from there to home. Raffles went to his rooms at the Albany and I to mine on Mount Street.

III.

When we saw the evening papers, we knew that the affair had taken on even more bizarre aspects. But we still had no inkling of the horrifying metamorphosis yet to come.

I doubt if there is a literate person in the West — or in the Orient, for that matter — who has not read about the strange case of Mr. James Phillimore. At eight in the morning, a hansom cab from Maida Vale pulled up before the gates of his estate. The housekeeper and the cook and Mr. Phillimore were the only occupants of the house. The area outside the walls was being surveilled by eight men from the Metropolitan Police Department. The cab driver rang the electrically operated bell at the gate. Mr. Phillimore walked out of the house and down the gravel path to the gate. Here he was observed by the cab driver, a policeman near the gate, and another in a tree. The latter could see clearly the entire front yard and house, and another man in a tree could clearly see the entire back yard and the back of the house.

Mr. Phillimore opened the gate but did not step through it. Commenting to the cabbie that it looked like rain, he added that he would return to the house to get his umbrella. The cabbie, the policemen, and the housekeeper saw him reenter the house. The housekeeper was at that moment in the room which occupied the front part of the ground floor of the house. She went into the kitchen as Mr. Phillimore entered the house. She did, however, hear his footsteps on the stairs from the hallway which led up to the first floor.

She was the last one to see Mr. Phillimore. He did not come back out of the house. After half an hour Mr. Mackenzie, the Scotland Yard inspector in charge, decided that Mr. Phillimore had somehow become aware that he was under surveillance. Mackenzie gave the signal, and he with three men entered the gate, another four retaining their positions outside. At no time was any part of the area outside the walls unobserved. Nor was the area inside the walls unscrutinized at any time.

The warrant duly shown to the housekeeper, the policemen entered the house and made a thorough search. To their astonishment, they could find no trace of Mr.

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Phillimore. The six-foot-six, twenty-stone* gentleman had utterly disappeared.

For the next two days, the house — and the yard around it— was the subject of the most intense investigation. This established that the house contained no secret tunnels or hideaways. Every cubic inch was accounted for. It was impossible for him not to have left the house; yet he clearly had not done so.

"Another minute's delay, and we would have been cornered," Raffles said, taking another Sullivan from his silver cigarette case. "But, Lord, what's going on there, what mysterious forces are working there? Notice that no jewels were found in the house. At least, the police reported none. Now, did Phillimore actually go back to get his umbrella? Of course not. The umbrella was in the stand by the entrance; yet he went right by it and on upstairs. So, he observed the foxes outside the gate and bolted into his briar bush like the good little rabbit he was."

"And where is the briar bush?" I said.

"Ah!" That's the question," Raffles breathed. "What kind of a rabbit is it which pulls the briar bush in after it? That is the sort of mystery which has attracted even the Great Detective himself. He has condescended to look into it."

"Then let us stay away from the whole affair!" I cried. "We have been singularly fortunate that none of our victims have called in your relative!"

Raffles was a third or fourth cousin to Holmes, though neither had, to my knowledge, even seen the other. I doubt that the sleuth had even gone to Lord's, or anywhere else, to see a cricket match.

"I wouldn't mind matching wits with him," Raffles said. "Perhaps he might then change his mind about who's the most dangerous man in London."

"We have more than enough money," I said. "Let's drop the whole business."

"It was only yesterday that you were complaining of boredom, Bunny," he said. "No, I think we should pay a visit to our journalist. He may know something that we, and possibly the police, don't know. However, if you prefer," he added contemptuously, "you may stay home."

That stung me, of course, and I insisted that I accompany him. A few minutes later, we got into a hansom, and Raffles told the driver to take us to Praed Street.

IV.

Persano's apartment was at the

*Two hundred and eighty pounds.

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end of two flights of Carrara marble steps and a carved mahogany banister. The porter conducted us to 10-C but left when Raffles tipped him handsomely. Raffles knocked on the door. After receiving no answer within a minute, he picked the lock. A moment later, we were inside a suite of extravagantly furnished rooms. A heavy odor of incense hung in the air.

I entered the bedroom and halted aghast. Persano, clad only in underwear, lay on the floor. The underwear, I regret to say, was the sheer black lace of the *demi-mondaine.* I suppose that if brassieres had existed at that time he would have been wearing one. I did not pay his dress much attention, however, because of his horrible expression. His face was cast into a mask of unutterable terror.

Near the tips of his outstretched fingers lay the large matchbox. It was open, and in it writhed *some thing.*

I drew back, but Raffles, after one soughing of intaken breath, felt the man's forehead and pulse and looked into the rigid eyes.

"Stark staring mad," he said. "Frozen with the horror that comes from the deepest of abysses."

Emboldened by his example, I drew near the box. Its contents looked somewhat like a worm, a thick tubular worm, with a dozen slim tenacles projecting from one end. This could be presumed to be its head, since the area just above the roots of the tentacles was ringed with small pale-blue eyes. These had pupils like a cat's. There was no nose or nasal openings or mouth.

"God!" I said shuddering. "What is it?"

"Only God knows," Raffles said. He lifted Persano's right hand and looked at the tips of the fingers. "Note the fleck of blood on each," he said. "They look as if pins have been stuck into them."

He bent over closer to the thing in the box and said, "The tips of the tentacles bear needlelike points, Bunny. Perhaps Persano is not so much paralyzed from horror as from venom."

"Don't get any closer, for Heaven's sake!" I said.

"Look, Bunny!" he said. "Doesn't that thing have a tiny shining object in one of its tentacles?"

Despite my nausea, I got down by him and looked straight at the monster. "It seems to be a very thin and slightly curving piece of glass," I said. "What of it?"

Even as I spoke, the end of the tentacle which held the object opened, and the object disappeared within it.

"That *glass,*" Raffles said, "is

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what's left of the *sapphire.* It's eaten it. That piece seems to have been the last of it."

"Eaten a sapphire?" I said, stunned. "Hard metal, blue corundum?"

"I think, Bunny," he said slowly, "the sapphire may only have looked like a sapphire. Perhaps it was not aluminum oxide but something hard enough to fool an expert. The interior may have been filled with something softer than the shell. Perhaps the shell held an embryo."

"What?" I said.

"I mean, Bunny, is it inconceivable, but nevertheless true, that that thing might have *hatched* from the jewel?"

V.

We left hurriedly a moment later. Raffles had decided against taking the monster — for which I was very grateful — because he wanted the police to have all the clues available.

"There's something very wrong here, Bunny," he said. "Very sinister." He lit a Sullivan and added in a drawl, "Very *alien!*"

"You mean un-British?" I said.

"I mean...un-Earthly."

A little later, we got out of the cab at St. James' Park and walked across it to the Albany. In Raffles' room, smoking cigars and drinking Scotch whisky and soda, we discussed the significance of all we had seen but could come to no explanation, reasonable or otherwise. The next morning, reading the *Times,* the *Pall Mall Gazette,* and the *Daily Telegraph,* we learned how narrowly we had escaped. According to the papers, Inspectors Hopkins and Mackenzie and the private detective Holmes had entered Persano's rooms two minutes after we had left. Persano had died while on the way to the hospital.

"Not a word about the worm in the box," Raffles said. "The police are keeping it a secret. No doubt, they fear to alarm the public."

There would be, in fact, no official reference to the creature. Nor was it until 1922 that Dr. Watson made a passing reference to it in a published adventure of his colleague. I do not know what happened to the thing, but I suppose that it must have been placed in a jar of alcohol. There it must have quickly perished. No doubt the jar is collecting dust on some shelf in the backroom of some police museum. Whatever happened to it, it must have been disposed of. Otherwise, the world would not be what it is today.

"Strike me, there's only one thing to do, Bunny!" Raffles said after he'd put the last paper down. "We must get into Phillimore's house and look for ourselves!"

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I did not protest. I was more afraid of his scorn than of the police. However, we did not launch our little expedition that evening. Raffles went out to do some reconnoitering on his own, both among the East End fences and around the house in Kensal Rise. The evening of the second day, he appeared at my rooms. I had not been idle, however. I had gathered a supply of more corks for the gatetop spikes by drinking a number of bottles of champagne.

"The police guard has been withdrawn from the estate itself," he said. "I didn't see any men in the woods nearby. So, we break into the late Mr. Phillimore's house tonight. If he is late, that is," he added enigmatically.

As the midnight chimes struck, we went over the gate once more. A minute later, Raffles was taking out the pane from the glass door. This he did with his diamond, a pot of treacle, and a sheet of brown paper, as he had done the night we broke in and found our would-be blackmailer dead with his head crushed by a poker.

He inserted his hand through the opening, turned the key in the lock, and drew the bolt at the bottom of the door open. This had been shot by a policeman who had then left by the kitchen door, or so we presumed. We went through the door, closed it behind us, and made sure that all the drapes of the front room were pulled tight. Then Raffles, as he did that evil night long ago, lit a match and with it a gas light. The flaring illumination showed us a room little changed. Apparently, Mr. Phillimore had not been interested in redecorating. We went out into the hallway and upstairs, where three doors opened onto the first-floor hallway.

The first door led to the bedroom. It contained a huge canopied bed, a midcentury monster Baird had bought secondhand in some East End shop, a cheap maple tallboy, a rocking chair, a thunder mug, and two large overstuffed leather armchairs.

"There was only one armchair the last time we were here," Raffles said.

The second room was unchanged, being as empty as the first time we'd seen it. The room at the rear was the bathroom, also unchanged.

We went downstairs and through the hallway to the kitchen, and then we descended into the coal cellar. This also contained a small wine pantry. As I expected, we had found nothing. After all, the men from the Yard were thorough, and what they might have missed, Holmes would have found. I was about to suggest to Raffles that we should admit failure and leave before somebody saw the lights in

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the house. But a sound from upstairs stopped me.

Raffles had heard it, too. Those ears missed little. He held up a hand for silence, though none was needed. He said, a moment later, "Softly, Bunny! It may be a policeman. But I think it is probably our quarry!"

We stole up the wooden steps, which insisted on creaking under our weight. Thence we crept into the kitchen, and from there into the hallway and then into the front room. Seeing nobody, we went up the steps to the first floor once more and ginerly opened the door of each room and looked within.

While we were poking our heads into the bathroom, we heard a noise again. It came from somewhere in the front of the house, though whether it was upstairs or down we could not tell.

Raffles beckoned to me, and I followed, also on tiptoe, down the hall. He stopped at the door of the middle room, looked within, then led me to the door of the bedroom. On looking in (remember, we had not turned out the gaslights yet), he started. And he said, "Lord! One of the armchairs! It's gone!"

"But-but...who'd want to take a chair?" I said.

"Who, indeed!" he said, and ran down the steps with no attempt to keep quiet. I gathered my wits enough to order my feet to get moving. Just as I reached the door, I heard Raffles outside shouting, "There he goes!" I ran out onto the little tiled veranda. Raffles was halfway down the gravel path, and a dim figure was plunging through the open gate. Whoever he was, he had had a key to the gate.

I remember thinking, irrelevantly, how cool the air had become in the short time we'd been in the house. Actually, it was not such an irrelevant thought since the advent of the cold air had caused a heavy mist. It hung over the road and coiled through the woods. And, of course, it helped the man we were chasing.

Raffles was as keen as a bill-collector chasing a debtor, and he kept his eyes on the vague figure until it plunged into a grove. When I came out its other side, breathing hard, I found Raffles standing on the edge of a narrow but rather deeply sunk brook. Nearby, half shrouded by the mist, was a short and narrow footbridge. Down the path that started from its other end was another of the half-built houses.

He didn't cross that bridge," Raffles said. "I'd have heard him. If he went through the brook, he'd have done some splashing, and I'd have heard it. But he didn't have time to double back. Let's cross the bridge and see if he's left any footprints in the mud."

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We walked Indian file across the very narrow bridge. It bent a little under our weight, giving us an uneasy feeling. Raffles said, "The contractor must be using as cheap materials as he can get away with. I hope he's putting better stuff into the houses. Otherwise, the first strong wind will blow them away."

"It does seem rather fragile," I said. "The builder must be a fly-by-night. But nobody builds anything as they used to do."

Raffles crouched down at the other end of the bridge, lit a match, and examined the ground on both sides of the path. "There are any number of prints," he said disgustedly. "They undoubtedly are those of the workmen, though the prints of the man we want could be among them. But I doubt it. They're all made by heavy workingmen's boots."

He sent me down the steep muddy bank to look for prints on the south side of the bridge. He went along the bank north of the bridge. Our matches flared and died while we called out the results of our inspections to each other. The only tracks we saw were ours. We scrambled back up the bank and walked a little way onto the bridge. Side by side, we leaned over the excessively thin railing to stare down into the brook. Raffles lit a Sullivan, and the pleasant odor drove me to light one up too.

"There's something uncanny here, Bunny. Don't you feel it?"

I was about to reply when he put his hand on my shoulder. Softly, he said, "Did you hear a groan?"

"No", I replied, the hairs on the back of my neck rising like the dead from the grave.

Suddenly, he stamped the heel of his boot hard upon the plank. And then I heard a very low moan.

Before I could say anything to him, he was over the railing. He landed with a squish of mud on the bank. A match flared under the bridge, and for the first time I comprehended how thin the wood of the bridge was. I could see the flame through the planks.

Raffles yelled with horror. The match went out. I shouted, "What is it?" Suddenly, I was falling. I grabbed at the railing, felt it *dwindle* out of my grip, struck the cold water of the brook, felt the planks beneath me, felt them sliding away, and shouted once more. Raffles, who had been knocked down and buried for a minute by the collapsed bridge, rose unsteadily. Another match flared, and he cursed. I said, somewhat stupidly, "Where's the bridge?"

"Taken flight," he groaned. "Like the chair!"

He leaped past me and scrambled up the bank. At its top

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he stood for a minute, staring into the moonlight and the darkness beyond. I crawled shivering out of the brook, rose even more unsteadily, and clawed up the greasy cold mud of the steep bank. A minute later, breathing harshly, and feeling dizzy with unreality, I was standing by Raffles. He was breathing almost as hard as I.

"What *is* it?" I said.

"*What* is it, Bunny?" he said slowly. "It's something that can change its shape to resemble almost anything. As of now, however, it is not what it is but *where* it is that we must determine. We must find it and kill it, even if it should take the shape of a beautiful woman or a child."

"What are you talking about?" I cried.

"Bunny, as God is my witness, when I lit that match under the bridge, I saw one brown eye staring at me. It was embedded in a part of the planking that was thicker than the rest. And it was not far from what looked like a pair of lips and one malformed ear. Apparently, it had not had time to complete its transformation. Or, more likely, it retained organs of sight and hearing so that it would know what was happening in its neighborhood. If it sealed off all its organs of detection, it would not have the slightest idea when it would be safe to change shape again."

"Are you insane?" I said.

"Not unless you share my insanity, since you saw the same things I did. Bunny, that thing can somehow alter its flesh and bones. It has such control over its cells, its organs, its bones — which somehow can switch from rigidity to extreme flexibility — that it can look like other human beings. It can also metamorphose to look like objects. Such as the armchair in the bedroom, which looked exactly like the original. No wonder that Hopkins and Mackenzie and even the redoubtable Holmes failed to find Mr. James Phillimore. Perhaps they may even have sat on him while resting from the search. It's too bad that they did not rip into the chair with a knife in their quest for the jewels. I think that they would have been more than surprised.

"I wonder who the original Phillimore was? There is no record of anybody who could have been the model. But perhaps it based itself on somebody with a different name but took the name of James Phillimore from a tombstone or a newspaper account of an American. Whatever it did on that account, it was also the bridge that you and I crossed. A rather sensitive bridge, a sore bridge, which could not keep from groaning a little when our hard boots pained it."

I could not believe him. Yet I

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could *not* not believe him.

VI.

Raffles predicted that the thing would be running or walking to Maida Vale. "And there it will take a cab to the nearest station and be on its way into the labyrinth of London. The devil of it is that we won't know what, or whom, to look for. It could be in the shape of a woman, or a small horse, for all I know. Or maybe a tree, though that's not a very mobile refuge.

"You know," he continued after some thought, "there must be definite limitations on what it can do. It has demonstrated that it can stretch its mass out to almost paper-thin length. But it is, after all, subject to the same physical laws we are subject to as far as its mass goes. It has only so much substance, and so it can get only so big. And I imagine that it can compress itself only so much. So, when I said that it might be the shape of a child, I could have been wrong. It can probably extend itself considerably but cannot contract much."

As it turned out, Raffles was right. But he was also wrong. The thing had means for becoming smaller, though at a price.

"Where could it have come from, A.J.?"

"That's a mystery that might better be laid in the lap of Holmes," he said. "Or perhaps in the hands of the astronomers. I would guess that the thing is not autochthonous. I would say that it arrived here recently, perhaps from Mars, perhaps from a more distant planet, during the month of October, 1894. Do you remember, Bunny, when all the papers were ablaze with accounts of the large falling star that fell into the Straits of Dover, not five miles from Dover itself? Could it have been some sort of ship which could carry a passenger through the ether? From some heavenly body where life exists, intelligent life, though not life as we Terrestrials know it? Could it perhaps have crashed, its propulsive power having failed it? Hence, the friction of its too-swift descent burned away part of the hull? Or were the flames merely the outward expression of its propulsion, which might be huge rockets?"

Even now, as I write this in 1924, I marvel at Raffles' superb imagination and deductive powers. That was 1895, three years before Mr. Wells' *War of the Worlds* was published. It was true that Mr. Verne had been writing his wonderful tales of scientific inventions and extraordinary voyages for many years. But in none of them had he proposed life on other planets or the possibility of infiltration or invasion by alien

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sapients from far-off planets. The concept was, to me, absolutely staggering. Yet Raffles plucked it from what to others would be a complex of complete irrelevancies. And I was supposed to be the writer of fiction in this partnership!

"I connect the events of the falling star and Mr. Phillimore because it was not too long after the star fell that Mr. Phillimore suddenly appeared from nowhere. In January of this year Mr. Phillimore sold his first jewel to a fence. Since then, once a month, Mr. Phillimore has sold a jewel, four in all. These look like star sapphires. But we may suppose that they are not such because of our experience with the monsterlet in Persano's matchbox. Those pseudo jewels, Bunny, are eggs!"

"Surely you do not mean that?" I said.

"My cousin has a maxim which has been rather widely quoted. He says that, after you've eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbably, is the truth. Yes, Bunny, the race to which Mr. Phillimore belongs lays eggs. These are, in their initial form, anyway, something resembling star sapphires. The star shape inside them may be the first outlines of the embryo. I would guess that shortly before hatching, the embryo becomes opaque. The material inside, the yolk, is absorbed or eaten by the embryo. Then the shell is broken and the fragments are eaten by the little beast.

"And then, sometime after hatching, a short time, I'd say, the beastie must become mobile, it wriggles away, it takes refuge in a hole, a mouse hole, perhaps. And there it feeds upon cockroaches, mice, and, when it gets larger, rats. And then, Bunny? Dogs? Babies? And then?"

"Stop," I cried. "It's too horrible to contemplate!"

"Nothing is too horrible to contemplate, Bunny, if one can do something about the thing contemplated. In any event, if I am right, and I pray that I am, only one egg has so far hatched. This was the first one laid, the one that Persano somehow obtained. Within thirty days, another egg will hatch. And this time the thing might get away. We must track down all the eggs and destroy them. But first we must catch the thing that is laying the eggs.

"That won't be easy. It has an amazing intelligence and adaptability. Or, at least, it has amazing mimetic abilities. In one month it learned to speak English perfectly and to become well acquainted with British customs. That is no easy feat, Bunny. There are thousands of Frenchmen and Americans who have been here for some time who have not yet comprehended the

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British language, temperament, or customs. And these are human beings, though there are, of course, some Englishmen who are uncertain about this."

"Really, A.J.!" I said. "We're not all that snobbish!"

"Aren't we? It takes one to know one, my dear colleague, and I am unashamedly snobbish. After all, if one is an Englishman, it's no crime to be a snob, is it? Somebody has to be superior, and we know who that someone is, don't we?"

"You were speaking of the thing," I said testily.

"Yes. It must be in a panic. It knows it's been found out, and it must think that by now the entire human race will be howling for its blood. At least, I hope so. If it truly knows us, it will realize that we would be extremely reluctant to report it to the authorities. We would not want to be certified. Nor does it know that we cannot stand an investigation into our own lives.

"But it will, I hope, be ignorant of this and so will be trying to escape the country. To do so, it will take the closest and fastest means of transportation, and to do that it must buy a ticket to a definite destination. That destination, I guess, will be Dover. But perhaps not."

At the Maida Vale cab station, Raffles made inquiries of various drivers. We were lucky. One driver had observed another pick up a woman who might be the person — or thing — we were chasing. Encouraged by Raffles' pound note, the cabbie described her. She was a giantess, he said, she seemed to be about fifty years old, and, for some reason, she looked familiar. To his knowledge, he had never seen her before.

Raffles had him describe her face feature by feature. He said, "Thank you," and turned away with a wink at me. When we were alone, I asked him to explain the wink.

"She — it — had familiar features because they were Phillimore's own, though somewhat feminized," Raffles said. "We are on the right track."

On the way into London in our own cab, I said, "I don't understand how the thing gets rid of its clothes when it changes shape. And where did it get its woman's clothes and the purse? And its money to buy the ticket?"

"Its clothes must be part of its body. It must have superb control; it's a sentient chameleon, a superchameleon."

"But its money?" I said. "I understand that it has been selling its eggs in order to support itself. Also, I assume, to disseminate its young. But from where did the thing, when it became a woman, get the money with which to buy a

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ticket? And was the purse a part of its body before the metamorphosis? If it was, then it must be able to detach parts of its body."

"I rather imagine it has caches of money here and there," Raffles said.

We got out of the cab near St. James's Park, walked to Raffles' rooms at the Albany, quickly ate a breakfast brought in by the porter, donned false beards and plain-glass spectacles and fresh clothes, and then packed a Gladstone bag and rolled up a traveling rug. Raffles also put on a finger a vulgar large ring. This concealed in its hollow interior a spring-operated knife, tiny but very sharp. Raffles had purchased it after his escape from the Camorra deathtrap (described in *The Last Laugh*). He said that if he had had such a device then, he might have been able to cut himself loose instead of depending upon someone else to rescue him from Count Corbucci's devilish automatic executioner. And now a hunch told him to wear the ring during this particular exploit.

We boarded a hansom a few minutes later and soon were on the Charing Cross platform waiting for the train to Dover. And then we were off, comfortably ensconced in a private compartment, smoking cigars and sipping brandy from a flask carried by Raffles.

"I am leaving deduction and induction behind in favor of intuition, Bunny," Raffles said. "Though I could be wrong, intuition tells me that the thing is on the train ahead of us, headed for Dover."

"There are others who think as you do," I said, looking through the glass of the door. "But it must be inference, not intuition, that brings them here." Raffles glanced up in time to see the handsome aquiline features of his cousin and the beefy but genial features of his cousin's medical colleague go by. A moment later, Mackenzie's craggy features followed.

"Somehow," Raffles said, "that human bloodhound, my cousin, has sniffed out the thing's trail. Has he guessed any of the truth? If he has, he'll keep it to himself. The hardheads of the Yard would believe that he'd gone insane, if he imparted even a fraction of the reality behind the case."

VII.

Just before the train arrived at the Dover station, Raffles straightened up and snapped his fingers, a vulgar gesture I'd never known him to make before.

"Today's the day!" he cried. "Or it should be! Bunny, it's a matter of unofficial record that Phillimore came into the East End every thirty-first day to sell a jewel. Does this suggest that it lays an egg

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every thirty days? If so, then it lays another *today!* Does it do it as easily as the barnyard hen? Or does it experience some pain, some weakness, some tribulation and trouble analogous to that of human women? Is the passage of the egg a minor event, yet one which renders the layer prostrate for an hour or two? Can one lay a large and hard star sapphire with only a trivial difficulty, with only a pleased cackle?"

On getting off the train, he immediately began questioning porters and other train and station personnel. He was fortunate enough to discover a man who'd been on the train on which we suspected the thing had been. Yes, he had noticed something disturbing. A woman had occupied a compartment by herself, a very large woman, a Mrs. Brownstone. But when the train had pulled into the station, a huge man had left her compartment. She was nowhere to be seen. He had, however, been too busy to do anything about it even if there had been anything to do.

Raffles spoke to me afterward. "Could it have taken a hotel room so it could have the privacy needed to lay its egg?"

We ran out of the station and hired a cab to take us to the nearest hotel. As we pulled away, I saw Holmes and Watson talking to the very man we'd just been talking to.

The first hotel we visited was the Lord Warden, which was near the railway station and had a fine view of the harbor. We had no luck there, nor at the Burlington, which was on Liverpool Street, nor the Dover Castle, on Clearence Place. But at the King's Head, also on Clearence Place, we found that he — it — had recently been there. The desk clerk informed us that a man answering our description had checked in. He had left exactly five minutes ago. He had looked pale and shaky, as though he'd had too much to drink the night before.

As we left the hotel, Holmes, Watson, and Mackenzie entered. Holmes gave us a glance that poked chills through me. I was sure that he must have noted us in the train, at the station, and now at this hotel. Possibly, the clerks in the other hotels had told him that he had been preceded by two men asking questions about the same man.

Raffles hailed another cab and ordered the driver to take us along the waterfront, starting near Promenade Pier. As we rattled along, he said, "I may be wrong, Bunny, but I feel that Mr. Phillimore is going home."

"To Mars?" I said, startled. "Or wherever his home planet may be?"

"I rather think that his destination is no farther than the vessel that brought him here. It

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may still be under the waves, lying on the bottom of the straits, which is nowhere deeper than twenty-five fathoms. Since it must be airtight, it could be like Mr. Campbell's and Ash's all-electric submarine. Mr. Phillimore could be heading toward it, intending to hide out for some time. To lie low, literally, while affairs cool off in England."

"And how would he endure the pressure and the cold of twenty-five fathoms of sea water while on his way down to the vessel?" I said.

"Perhaps he turns into a fish," Raffles said irritatedly.

I pounted out the window. "Could that be he?"

"It might well be *it*," he replied. He shouted for the cabbie to slow down. The very tall, broad-shouldered, and huge-paunched man with the great rough face and the nose like a red pickle looked like the man described by the agent and the clerk. Moreover, he carried the purplish Gladstone bag which they had also described.

Our hansom swerved toward him; he looked at us; he turned pale; he began running. How had he recognized us? I do not know. We were still wearing the beards and spectacles, and he had seen us only briefly by moonlight and matchlight when we were wearing black masks. Perhaps he had a keen sense of odor, though how he could have picked up our scent from among the tar, spices, sweating men and horses, and the rotting garbage floating on the water, I do not know.

Whatever his means of detection, he recognized us. And the chase was on.

It did not last long on land. He ran down a pier for private craft, untied a rowboat, leaped into it, and began rowing as if he were training for the Henley Royal Regatta. I stood for a moment on the edge of the pier; I was stunned and horrified. His left foot was in contact with the Gladstone bag, and it was melting, flowing *into* his foot. In sixty seconds, it had disappeared except for a velvet bag it contained. This, I surmised, held the egg that the thing had laid in the hotel room.

A minute later, we were rowing after him in another boat while its owner shouted and shook an impotent fist at us. Presently, other shouts joined us. Looking back, I saw Mackenzie, Watson, and Holmes standing by the owner. But they did not talk long to him. They ran back to their cab and raced away.

Raffles said, "They'll be boarding a police boat, a steam-driven paddlewheeler or screwship. But I doubt that it can catch up with *that*, if there's a good wind and a fair head start."

That was Phillimore's destina-

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tion, a small single-masted sailing ship riding at anchor about fifty yards out. Raffles said that she was a cutter. It was about thirty-five feet long, was fore-and-aft rigged, and carried a jib, forestaysail, and mainsail — according to Raffles. I thanked him for the information, since I knew nothing and cared as much about anything that moves on water. Give me a good solid horse on good solid ground any time.

Phillimore was a good rower, as he should have been with that great body. But we gained slowly on him. By the time he was boarding the cutter *Alicia*, we were only a few yards behind him. He was just going over the railing when the bow of our boat crashed into the stern of his. Raffles and I went head over heels, oars flying. But we were up and swarming up the rope ladder within a few seconds. Raffles was first, and I fully expected him to be knocked in the head with a belaying pin or whatever it is that sailors use to knock people in the head. Later, he confessed that he expected to have his skull crushed in, too. But Phillimore was too busy recruiting a crew to bother with us at that moment.

When I say he was recruiting, I mean that he was splitting himself into three sailors. At that moment, he lay on the foredeck and was melting, clothes and all.

We should have charged him then and seized him while he was helpless. But we were too horrified. I, in fact, became nauseated, and I vomited over the railing. While I was engaged in this, Raffles got control of himself. He advanced swiftly toward the three-lobed monstrosity on the deck. He had gotten only a few feet, however, when a voice rang out.

"Put up yore dooks, you swells! Reach for the blue!"

Raffles froze. I raised my head and saw through teary eyes an old grizzled salt. He must have come from the cabin on the poopdeck, or whatever they call it, because he had not been visible when we came aboard. He was aiming a huge Colt revolver at us.

Meanwhile, the schizophrenic transformation was completed. Three little sailors, none higher than my waist, stood before us. They were identically featured, and they looked exactly like the old salt except for their size. They had beards and wore white-and-blue striped stocking caps, large earrings in the left ear, red-and-black-striped jerseys, blue calf-length baggy pants, and they were barefooted. They began scurrying around, up came the anchor, the sails were set, and we were moving at a slant past the great Promenade Pier.

The old sailor had taken over

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the wheel after giving one of the midgets his pistol. Meanwhile, behind us, a small steamer, its smokestack belching black, tried vainly to catch up with us.

After about ten minutes, one of the tiny sailors took over the wheel. The old salt and one of his duplicates herded us into the cabin. The little fellow held the gun on us while the old sailor tied our wrists behind us and our legs to the upright pole of a bunk with a rope.

"You filthy traitor!" I snarled at the old sailor. "You are betraying the entire human race! Where is your common humanity?"

The old tar cackled and rubbed his gray wirelike whiskers.

"Me humanity? It's where the lords in Parliament and the fat bankers and the church-going factory owners of Manchester keep theirs, me fine young gentleman! In me pocket! Money talks louder than common humanity any day, as any of your landed lords or great cotton spinners will admit when they're drunk in the privacies of their mansion! What did common humanity ever do for me but give me parents the galloping consumption and make me sisters into drunken whores?"

I said nothing more. There was no reasoning with such a beastly wretch. He looked us over to make sure we were secure, and he and the tiny sailor left. Raffles said, "As long as Phillimore remains — like Gaul — in three parts, we have a chance. Surely, each of the trio's brain must have only a third of the intelligence of the original Phillimore I hope. And this little knife concealed in my ring will be the key to our liberty. I hope."

Fifteen minutes later, he had released himself and me. We went into the tiny galley, which was next to the cabin and part of the same structure. There we each took a large butcher knife and a large iron cooking pan. And when, after a long wait, one of the midgets came down into the cabin, Raffles hit him alongside the head with a pan before he could yell out. To my horror, Raffles then squeezed the thin throat between his two hands, and he did not let loose until the thing was dead.

"No time for niceties, Bunny," he said, grinning ghastly as he extracted the jewel-egg from the corpse's pocket. "Phillimore's a type of Boojum. If he succeeds in spawning many young, mankind will disappear softly and quietly, one by one. If it becomes necessary to blow up this ship and us with it, I'll not hesitate a moment. Still, we've reduced its forces by one-third. Now let's see if we can't make it one hundred percent."

He put the egg in his own pocket. A moment later, cautiously, we stuck our heads from the

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structure and looked out. We were in the forepart, facing the foredeck, and thus the old salt at the wheel couldn't see us. The other two midgets were working in the rigging at the orders of the steersman. I suppose that the thing actually knew little of sailsmanship and had to be instructed.

"Look at that, dead ahead," Raffles said. "This is a bright clear day, Bunny. Yet there's a patch of mist there that has no business being there. And we're sailing directly into it."

One of the midgets was holding a device which looked much like Raffles' silver cigarette case except that it had two rotatable knobs on it and a long thick wire sticking up from its top. Later, Raffles said that he thought that it was a machine which somehow sent vibrations through the ether to the spaceship on the bottom of the straits. These vibrations, coded, of course, signaled the automatic machinery on the ship to extend a tube to the surface. And an artificial fog was expelled from the tube.

His explanation was unbelievable, but it was the only one extant. Of course, at that time neither of us had heard of wireless, although some scientists knew of Hertz's experiments with oscillations. And Marconi was to patent the wireless telegraph the following year. But Phillimore's wireless must have been far advanced over anything we have in 1924.

"As soon as we're in the mist, we attack," Raffles said.

A few minutes later, wreaths of grey fell about us, and our faces felt cold and wet. We could barely see the two midgets working furiously to let down the sails. We crept out onto the deck and looked around the cabin's corner at the wheel. The old tar was no longer in sight. Nor was there any reason for him to be at the wheel. The ship was almost stopped. It obviously must be over the space vessel resting on the mud twenty fathoms below.

Raffles went back into the cabin after telling me to keep an eye on the two midgets. A few minutes later, just as I was beginning to feel panicky about his long absence, he popped out of the cabin.

"The old man was opening the petcocks," he said. "This ship will sink soon with all that water pouring in."

"Where is he?" I said.

"I hit him over the head with the pan," Raffles said. "I suppose he's drowning now."

At that moment, the two little sailors called out for the old sailor and the third member of the trio to come running. They were lowering the cutter's boat and apparently thought there wasn't much time before the ship went down. We ran

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out at them through the fog just as the boat struck the water. They squawked like chickens suddenly seeing a fox, and they leaped down into the boat. They didn't have far to go since the cutter's deck was now only about two feet above the waves. We jumped down into the boat and sprawled on our faces. Just as we scrambled up, the cutter rolled over, fortunately away from us, and bottom up. The lines attached to the davit had been loosed, and so our boat was not dragged down some minutes later when the ship sank.

A huge round form, like the back of a Brobdingnagian turtle, broke water beside us. Our boat rocked, and water shipped in, soaking us. Even as we advanced on the two tiny men, who jabbed at us with their knives, a port opened in the side of the great metal craft. Its lower part was below the surface of the sea, and suddenly water rushed into it, carrying our boat along with it. The ship was swallowing our boat and us along with it.

Then the port had closed behind us, but we were in a metallic and well-lit chamber. While the fight raged, with Raffles and me swinging our pans and thrusting our knives at the very agile and speedy midgets, the water was pumped out. As we were to find out, the vessel was sinking back to the mud of the bottom.

The two midgets finally leaped from the boat onto a metal platform. One pressed a stud in the wall, and another port opened. We jumped after them, because we knew that if they got away and got their hands on their weapons, and these might be fearsome indeed, we'd be lost. Raffles knocked one off the platform with a swipe of the pan, and I slashed at the other with my knife.

The thing below the platform cried out in a strange language, and the other one jumped down beside him He sprawled on top of his fellow, and within a few seconds they were melting together.

It was an act of sheer desperation. If they had had more than one-third of their normal intelligence, they probably would have taken a better course of action. Fusion took time, and this time we did not stand there paralyzed with horror. We leaped down and caught the thing halfway between its shape as two men and its normal, or natural, shape. Even so, tentacles with the poisoned claws on their ends sprouted, and the blue eyes began to form. It looked like a giant version of the thing in Persano's matchbox. But it was only two-thirds as large as it would have been if we'd not slain the detached part of it on the cutter. Its tentacles also were not as long as they would have been, but

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even so we could not get past them to its body. We danced around just outside their reach, cutting the tips with knives or batting them with the pans. The thing was bleeding, and two of its claws had been knocked off, but it was keeping us off while completing its metamorphosis. Once the thing was able to get to its feet, or I should say, its pseudopods, we'd be at an awful disadvantage.

Raffles yelled at me and ran toward the boat. I looked at him stupidly, and he said, "Help me, Bunny!"

I ran to him, and he said, "Slide the boat onto the thing, Bunny!"

"It's too heavy," I yelled, but I grabbed the side while he pushed on its stern; and somehow, though I felt my intestines would spurt out, we slid it over the watery floor. We did not go very fast, and the thing, seeing its peril, started to stand up. Raffles stopped pushing and threw his frying pan at it. It struck the thing at its head end, and down it went. It lay there a moment as if stunned, which I suppose it was.

Raffles came around to the side opposite mine, and when we were almost upon the thing, but still out of reach of its vigorously waving tentacles, we lifted the bow of the boat. We didn't raise it very far, since it was very heavy. But when we let it fall, it crushed six of the tentacles beneath it. We had planned to drop it squarely on the middle of the thing's loathsome body, but the tentacles kept us from getting any closer.

Nevertheless, it was partially immobilized. We jumped into the boat and, using its sides as a bulwark, slashed at the tips of the tentacles that were still free. As the ends came over the side, we cut them off or smashed them with the pans. Then we climbed out, while it was screaming through the openings at the ends of the tentacles, and we stabbed it again and again. Greenish blood flowed from its wounds until the tentacles suddenly ceased writhing. The eyes became lightless; the greenish ichor turned black-red and congealed. A sickening odor, that of its death, rose from the wounds.

VIII.

It took several days to study the controls on the panel in the vessel's bridge. Each was marked with a strange writing which we would never be able to decipher. But Raffles, the ever redoubtable Raffles, discovered the control that would move the vessel from the bottom to the surface, and he found out how to open the port to the outside. That was all we needed to know.

Meantime, we ate and drank from the ship's stores which had been laid in to feed the old tar. The

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other food looked nauseating, and even if it had been attractive, we'd not have dared to try it. Three days later, after rowing the boat out onto the sea — the mist was gone — we watched the vessel, its port still open, sink back under the waters. And it is still there on the bottom, for all I know.

We decided against telling the authorities about the thing and its ship. We had no desire to spend time in prison, no matter how patriotic we were. We might have been pardoned because of our great services. But then again we might, according to Raffles, be shut up for life because the authorities would want to keep the whole affair a secret.

Raffles also said that the vessel probably contained devices which, in Great Britain's hands, would ensure her supremacy. But she was already the most powerful nation on Earth, and who knew what Pandora's box we'd be opening? We did not know, of course, that in twenty-three years the Great War would slaughter the majority of our best young men and would start our nation toward second-classdom.

Once ashore, we took passage back to London. There we launched the month's campaign that resulted in stealing and destroying every one of the sapphire-eggs. One had hatched, and the thing had taken refuge inside the walls, but Raffles burned the house down, though not until after rousing its human occupants. It brokes our hearts to steal jewels worth in the neighborhood of a million pounds and then destroy them. But we did it, and so the world was saved.

Did Holmes guess some of the truth? Little escaped those grey hawk's eyes and the keen grey brain behind them. I suspect that he knew far more than he told even Watson. That is why Watson, in writing *The Problem of Thor Bridge,* stated that there were three cases in which Holmes had completely failed.

There was the case of James Phillimore, who returned into his house to get an umbrella and was never seen again. There was the case of Isadora Persano, who was found stark mad, staring at a worm in a match box, a worm unknown to science. And there was the case of the cutter *Alicia,* which sailed on a bright spring morning into a small patch of mist and never emerged, neither she nor her crew ever being seen again.



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Taking apart stories and critics

Jeez, I dunno, Ed. Like Barry said, this letters column is a good idee, but every time I cut loose from standard wordrates this typewriter gets galloping diarrhea.

But anyway... sssshhhluuuuuuup! A quick wipe and off we go.

I like the way Joanna Russ goes on in her pyrotechnic style without regard for the consequences. But now for a small consequence. In her review of *Cliffs Notes* in the April issue, she objects to the view that fiction is made up of detachable parts like a watch. Well it's sure as hell built up that way; lotsa words, characters, emotions spinning around, interrelating, ticking along to the point where a bell goes DING! in the reader's mind.

Sure, when you take it apart it doesn't ding anymore. But any working writer who reads a good story asks her/himself: How'd *this* writer do it? In order to find out, one has to retrace the creative process, taking the elements apart and determining their function, *in a mechanical sense*, apart from their meaning in the story.

Like this: A guy lifts his arm. The same mechanics function whether he's killing his grandma or waving the flag. But he can't do either one until he learns how to lift his arm. And writers can't tell a story without knowing the structure of a story — even if they've forgotten when they learned it.

A lot of smart people are wasting my time and yours because they regard fiction as a thing-in-itself to be copied from a distance, rather than a process to be closely studied. I'm not sure Joanna meant it that way, but if she's opposed to dissection, what alternative does she offer except to seek the "Storiness" of the story? The last time we went on that trip we wound up with illiterate monks illuminating manuscripts.

I look forward to a clarification. Meanwhile...

I'm sure a lot of us old sossidge-factory hands suffer ambivalent feelings about Silverberg. We would like to believe that one of our number has clawed his way up from Hacksville and attained the exalted status of *Literateur.* (Pardon me while I wipe off the typewriter again. Sssssshlluuuup!) At the same time we are reluctant to admit (Ah, not Silverberg! I stopped reading his shit fifteen years ago...) that it can be done — otherwise we'll have to come up with an excuse for not doing it ourselves.

(In my case it's my back. An old whiplash.)

I will say in closing that I regard with glazed eyeball the Protectionist tendency which Joanna shares with the aforementioned Barry M. Both report motivations of love while rapping others sharply about the head and shoulders for treading upon the sacred sod of science-fiction. To borrow a phrase from Kilgore Trout: "This is bulshit." As a credential for criticism, "love" has proven historically suspect when applied to intangibles such as "The Future of Science-Fiction" or "The Good of the Human Race." Torquemada did not torture people because he hated them, but because he loved them so much he wanted to save their rotten twisted souls. (So the late JWC once scrawled on the title page of a story I'd submitted.) On that note of Tradition, I'll close.

— *Charles W. Runyon*

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Now that I've finished *The Dispossessed*, I find Miz Russ's review extremely obnoxious. She seems to have no case in saying it is a bad book. If I'd taken her review at face value, I probably wouldn't even have bothered reading the book.

I'm glad I did.

The spirit of describing a breakthrough in physics was most fantastic. I'd have to say I like this book better than *Left Hand of Darkness;* though on a purely entertainment level.

Such quibbling as the imitation of earth is ridiculous. Miz Russ's suggestion that problems on an alien planet would conform to our problems in their execution is absurd. How could that possibly be? I didn't find anything unusual about the way the two planets were described; and if a reader doesn't notice such things, the writer has made their point.

I'd like to see some male chauvanistic pigs reviewing books in the future; Miz Russ is too militantly female for me. How about those readers who were swayed by her ridiculous structural review into not reading this fine book?

P. Schuyler Miller had the best approach to reviewing books. If we criticise our field too much, there won't be anybody left to read it.

—Roy J. Schenck

Correction

On reading my story, "A Scarletin Study," in the March issue, I noticed that your printer seems to be out of umlauts and has a shortage of g's. At least, he substituted q's for g's in several places. I recently took a trip to Hamburg, Germany, and while there picked up cheap several boxes of umlauts. I am sending you one fourth-class mail. I have some old gee-strings around, and when I find them I'll ship them off, too. You can tell your printer he can stamp a dozen g's out of one string.

—Jonathan Swift SomersIII

F&SF regrets the error. Upcoming: A new Somers story, in which the famous dog-detective Ralph von Wau Wau and a new associate, one Cordwainer Bird, become involved in a plot to steal Venice. The title is "The Doge Whose Barque Was Worse Than His Bight."

Romance and Holmes

I am troubled by the short story "Sherlock Holmes Versus Mars," which appeared in the May 1975 issue of your magazine. The authors, Manly and Wade Wellman, have evidently researched their subject well — the 17 steps up to 221 B Baker Street, a note to Watson transfixed upon the mantle, references to Colonel Moran and Reichenbach Falls, the interesting suggestion that Morse Hudson, the Kensington Road shopkeeper, was husband to Holmes' housekeeper and son of the vile Hudson who drove James Armitage to his death — these and other touches amply demonstrate a deep knowledge of the affairs of Mr. Holmes.

By what error of judgement, then, can the authors suggest an affair between Mr. Holmes and his housekeeper? The authors say of Mr. Holmes and Mrs. Hudson, "they kissed, holding each other close, her rich curves pressed to his sinewy leanness." Further, they purport to quote Mr. Holmes as saying to Mrs. Hudson, "You never embarrass me, because I love you."

What an outrage it is to suggest that Mr. Holmes would do or say such things. I refer to the writings. In "The Adventure of the Dying Detective," it is said of Mr. Holmes regarding women,

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"he disliked and distrusted the sex." Holmes himself states in The Adventure of the Devil's Foot, "I have never loved, Watson." But it is in "A Scandal in Bohemia" that all doubt is laid to rest. Watson writes, of Holmes, "all emotions, and that one (love) particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind."

I am troubled that the authors could at the same time write so interesting and so bad a story. To mention the persian slipper in the same story as "rich curves" and "sinewy leanness" is in the poorest possible taste.

I can think of no more fitting punishment than that Mr. Holmes should leave his bees in Eastbourne, journey a second time across the Atlantic, and souse both Wellmans with a gasogene.

— Roderick G. Bates

I must say I was rather disturbed to see your recent account of my brother's activities during the so-called "War of the Worlds" (May). Whoever wrote the story (certainly not the more-or-less truthful Dr. Watson), although accurate in many respects, was guilty of a romanticism far worse than anything Watson has written.

I have spoken to Sherlock on this matter, but since his retirement he has taken little interest in the published accounts of his cases, real or otherwise. Indeed, it is difficult these days to get him interested in anything but his bees. "After all," said he, "it is a fiction magazine; as long as they call it fiction they may say anything they like about me."

Nevertheless, I would like to set the record straight. At no time, contrary to your story and others, has Sherlock been in love with anyone, let alone his landlady, Mrs. Hudson. Naturally a certain fondness existed, but certainly not to the degree shown in your story. In any case, Sherlock says he has never met the Wellmans, and idly wonders how they could possibly know what went on in Mrs. Hudson's private apartment.

Moreover, Mrs. Hudson's first name was not Martha. Martha was the woman Sherlock hired from 1917 to 1929 to keep house for him in Sussex. To imply that his landlady of many years would later work as a menial is irresponsible.

— Mycroft Holmes
London



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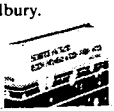


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